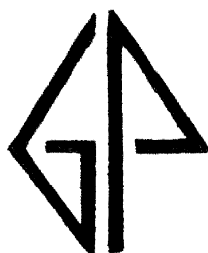


Science of Symbols

Deeper View of Indian Deities

By
“INDU” INDER JIT



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THE KEY

प्रसिद्ध साधर्म्यम् साध्य-साधनम्
उपमानम् तदेव प्रतीक-भावः

“Thou art formless, though possessing form, for by means of Maya Thou dost assume innumerable forms according to Thy desire. Thou Thyself art without beginning, and yet art the beginning of all. It is Thou who createth preserveth and destroyeth the world.”

“Mahanirvana Tantra.”

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A child was wandering,
In dark, narrow streets,
× × × ×
He stumbled,
Someone gave him a hand.
× × ×
He fell down,
Someone picked him up.
× × ×
He asked,
Someone gave him what he wanted.
× × ×
He was running about... ..
In aimless parambulations,
Panicky, unsure but wanting.
× × ×
Someone gave him a candle.
The awe began to ebb.
Someone lighted the candle,
The fear of fear began to fade.
× × ×
And the wandering came to a stop.
× × ×
The candle is His,
And the Light too !!

—“Indu”

CREDITS

Shri Narayana Swami, the great Tantric scholar and saint of modern times, inspired me to write this book. He was more than a teacher and a guide to me. He passed away in March 1973. I pay my tearful homage to his memory.

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Independence Day, 1977
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“Indu” Inder Jit

FOREWORD

For a modern reader heavily influenced by the western values of life, scientific advancement and mechanical speed, Indian philosophy and diversity in the Indian concept of God is not only baffling but seems to be a fairy tale to be discarded summarily.

The modern man has neither time in his present day fast life nor the will to pause, ponder and discover the eternal truth underlying the Indian concept of God. With the many inducements of modern material life, he safely forgets that his own entity basically is a composition of two units—the material and the spiritual. How much does he know of his spiritual entity? If he is devoid of this integral part of his own being, how could he claim the right of passing a judgment on Indian Gods and Goddesses?

I am glad that the author of this book has endeavoured to explain the symbolism and deeper meaning of the Indian deities with reason and understanding. Symbols abound in our objective world. They stand for brevity and serve as a link between communication and understanding. The author has explored the wonderful realm of the Hindu deities, the most fertile spiritual soil for developing an understanding of symbols and symbolism in our heritage.

In the scientific sense also symbols exist and could be defined as coded messages which serve as means of communication. It is commonly seen that the computer encodes the data on cards or tapes which the machine processes according to programmed algorithm and produces decoded output for the reader to understand. Likewise, a graphic artist encodes his thoughts on canvas or metal to be decoded and understood by the spectator. There is nothing surprising, therefore, if the learned creators of Indian mythology encoded symbolic representations of the deities for the future generations to understand spirituality. The early seers did not

have the modern facilities to record their experiences in detail and had to take resort to symbolism by necessity as also by desirability, for language, though the only medium available to an ordinary human being for communication is hardly a perfect medium. In fact, on higher planes language fails to act as a vehicle for communication and is likely to create confusion. There has to be a harmony between the communicator and the 'receiver' and if the latter does not have the aptitude "to receive", he tends to be lost in his own imagination which fails to identify itself with the communicator. It is for this reason that the ancient seers used very little of language and lifted their audience or seekers to the plane of experience without meddling much with verbal expression. Tagore has rightly said: "Thoughts require symbolic representation for development in oneself and communication to others. The symbols themselves may become wonderous, especially as they approach formlessness".

The book deals with spiritual symbolism with particular reference to the attributes of ten popular Hindu deities. The aim of the author is first to mention and to classify the controversial attributes of these deities and then to provide a rational explanation for their perpetuation through myth, legend and tradition of artistic depiction. The author treats symbolism as a conscious and deliberate technique of communication brought to the stature of a unified artistic device to express and illuminate the basic truth. He refers effectively to the misunderstanding prevailing among modern scholars and readers, both Western and Indian, about the Hindu deities. He has given interesting quotations from Max Mueller, Woodroffe, Maskell and others, known for their scholarship and spiritual insight.

The various physical attributes of the deities, undoubtedly, represent a consistent and scientific effort of ancient artists and thinkers to clothe philosophical wisdom with symbols and allegories so that the relatively difficult spiritual meaning becomes understandable even to the ordinary mind. In the wake of renewed and vigorous interest in Indian religious ways of life, specially in the West, the author's contribution will help in bringing scientific rationalism closer to traditional dogmatism.

Although the author is himself a spiritual aspirer and had the fortune to be in association with a number of men of God and masters of Yoga, he has taken all care to cut down sentimentality to the minimum and follow a rational pattern for projecting spiritual symbols and their meaning. The language, by and large, is simple and the diction sober and almost conservatively plain. There is no attempt to highlight any particular sectarian philosophy and that is why the text of the book is basically factual, strengthened by simple charts which are supported by illustrations and elaborate explanations. There is no padding which has kept the number of pages reasonably down.

I must congratulate the author for taking pains in making the difficult so simple to the reader. I hope and pray that his hard labour will bring light to the readers and give their life greater meaning.

August 15, 1977

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PART I

Chapter I Dating a Quest

Chapter II Hindu Spiritual Symbols—Beyond the Frontiers
of Doubt

Chapter III The Complementary Hindu Trinity

1

DATING A QUEST

The science of symbols came with the growth of human intellect. When man started drawing lines, he also started expressing his thoughts through this medium. Nature gave him appreciation for colours. He took up coloured stones or other such things and made his scribblings colourful. From the discovery of pre-historic caves one learns of many types of drawings, sculptures and carvings. These ancient works of art reflect the depth of human feelings and the level of the growth of human civilization at a particular period of time. It is still difficult to fix their exact time in relation to history.

History has its limitations. Some historians in the West have tried to fix the time of the Vedas. When we dispassionately go through their observations, we find that they have failed not because they did not make efforts to understand but because they could not rise above their mental conditioning.

The discovery of a pre-historic art gallery in the *Bhimbetka* caves near Bhopal in Central India gives an indication of the fact that man, as far back as about one lakh years, knew a good deal about art. This ancient art gallery is said to be the largest of its kind in the world. More than 600 caves, spread over an area of ten square kilometres, are at the bottom of giant monolithic rocks.

The Vedas are considered to be the oldest endeavour of man to limit the unlimited. What man experienced in the solitude of his being, he expressed in words which are beyond his own realm of limited understanding, least so if this understanding is further clouded by pride and prejudice. It is very difficult to reach the depths of these

revelations if we are alien to the super-dynamic vibrations of cosmic energy monitored through the medium of rishis (thinkers) who had conquered their desires and understood the spiritual meaning hidden behind the great drama of life and creation.

One needs a clear, unbiased mind to comprehend the truth behind symbols. Capacity and approach are two pre-requisites for any quest. A sharp and well-groomed intellect and a dedicated, patient and humble approach, not ridden by ego but riding it, are proper vehicles for this *journey beyond the object*. It is here that some emotionally handicapped thinkers have slipped and abandoned their quest.

Quite a few Indian and European thinkers have failed in comprehending the truth behind Vedic wisdom. I think they have spoilt the soup in their hurry to cook it quickly. If they have just let their minds soak in the ocean of Indian mythology, they would not have committed the errors which proved disastrous to those who depended on their writings for guidance. Let us see the facts for ourselves.

“After 300 A.D.”, Vincent Smith says, “Indian sculpture, properly so called, hardly deserves to be reckoned as art. The figures, both of men and animals, become stiff and formal, and the idea of power is clumsily expressed by the multiplication of members. The many-headed, many armed Gods and Goddesses, whose images crowd the walls and roofs of medieval temples, have no pretensions to beauty, and are frequently hideous and grotesque.”

Maskell speaks of “these hideous deities and animal heads and innumerable arms.”¹

Max Mueller, the German scholar, said to be the “master of the *Vedas*”, commenting on the *Vedas*, says: “These hymns, originally popular songs, short prayers and thanks-giving, sometimes true, genuine and even sublime but frequently childish, vulgar and obscure, were invested by the Brahmans with character of an inspired revelation and made the basis of a complete system of dogmatic theology.”²

1. *The Dance of Shiva*, Dr. A. Kommaraswamy. Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1952. P. 96.

2. *Rigveda Samhita*, London, 1890. Vol. I, Preface to the third volume of the first edition, page XLIII.

Sir John Woodroffe says: "A European Sanskritist told a friend of mine that Om said before a Mantra, is simply the "clearing of the throat" before utterance, and I suppose he would have said—the clearing of throat after utterance, for Om both precedes and follows a Mantra. Why, however, should one clear the throat then? Om has nothing to do with hawking sounds, or the throat etc."¹

These few examples suggest the extent to which, in modern times, serious scholars in their efforts to explain the Vedas have succeeded only in spreading gross ignorance. Instead of attempting to explain their failure, I would like to quote here the great thinker-saint of our times, Sri Aurobindo: "The Spiritual and psychological knowledge of the race was concealed for reasons now difficult to determine in the veil of concrete and material figures and symbols which protected the sense from the profane and revealed it to the initiated."

"One of the leading principles of the mystics was the sacredness and secrecy of self-knowledge of the Gods. This wisdom was, they thought, unfit, perhaps even dangerous, to the ordinary mind or in any case liable to perversion and misuse and loss of virtue if revealed to vulgar and unpurified spirits."²

To illustrate further the points made by Sri Aurobindo, I would like to quote from a common verse recited by the Hindus.

ऋतञ्च सत्यञ्चाभीद्धात्तपसोऽध्यजायत ।
ततो रात्र्यजायत ततः समुद्रो अर्णवः ॥
समुद्रादण्वादिधि - सवत्सरो अजायत ।
अहोरात्राणि विदधत् विश्वस्य मिषतो वशी ॥
सूर्योच्चन्द्रमसौ धाता यथापूर्वमकल्पयत् ।
दिवञ्च पृथिवी चान्तरिक्षमथो स्वः ॥³

Ritancha Satyanchabhiddhat tapasodhyajayata ।
Tato ratryajayata tatah samudro arnavah ॥
Samudrat arnavat adhi samvatsaro ajayata ।
Ahoratrani vidadhat vishvasya mishato vashi ॥
Suryachandramasau dhata yathapurvam akalpayat ।
Divancha prithivincha antarikshamatho swah ॥

1. *The Garland of Letters*, Madras, 1951, page 243.

2. "On the Veda", Pondicherry, 1952.

3. *Rigveda*-Mandal 10, Anwaka 12, Sukta 19, Richa 1-3.

“Rit and Sat were born out of intense heat. Out of that came night. Out of that the ocean came. From this came the year. The manifest world was created by the tamer. The creator created the Sun, the Moon, the Sky, the Earth and Space like the one before.”

Apparently, what could be a better example of wild fancies than the one given above ? But let us see the real meaning.

The one unchangeable truth came out of the bright, shining consciousness. In the Vedas, *Tapa* (तप) has been used to convey consciousness. *Rit* means Truth and *Sat* means the eternal unchangeable truth. This was the beginning of the shape of the Creation. From this came night. (‘Ratri’ or night here means the fog that was formed by the first vibrations or disturbances, and the unclear form of the creation). From this came the *Arnava* (अर्णव) and *Samudra* (समुद्र) the ocean. In the Vedas the God *Aapa* or water is described as the luminous being. He is the source of satisfaction. The word is also used in the sense of water and nectar. *Aapa* has also been used in the sense of light. (Aapo jyoti raso amritam brahma bhur bhuvah swarom. (आपो ज्योती रसोज्मृत ब्रह्म भूर्भुवः स्वरोम्) *Aapa* is *light, essence, nectar, Brahma, bhur, bhuvah, swah and Om*”).

That is how *arnava* here means light and *Samudra* (ocean) means the great ocean or expanse of light (Maha jyoti). In other words this means the appearance of a clear form of creation from the unclear foggy form

And then came Time (*sanivatsara*). In the Upanishads and the “Brahmans” सवसन्ति ऋतवोऽत्र¹ “*sanivasanti ritavotra*” suggests “that under which all weathers lie.” This is the concept of Time.

After that appeared the measure of Time—*ahoratri*—day and night. God created the Sun, the Moon, the Earth, the sky etc, as he had decided earlier.

Life began to sprout, grow, deepen and spread according to the divine plan. Knowledge began to spread. From awe and wonder came the quickened spirit for research and more knowledge. Poetry and science joined hands to glorify and praise the Supreme Lord.

Hindu cosmology provides the earliest key to the symbolic expressions in terms of science and poetic wisdom. Mighty rivers,

1. *Amar-Kosha* Bhanu Dikshit; Bombay

shady trees, natural elements—particularly the Sun and the Moon—came as handy symbols of the highest, supernatural forces. We find these symbols prevalent even in the Egyptian and Babylonian civilizations. We have ample proof of these in the excavations of the Indus Valley. Mohenjodaro and Harappa provide vital clues to our studies in religious symbolism.

Gradually, the importance of the human race as the main instrument on earth of divine expression began to assert itself. Many scholars, taking off from this human focus for spiritual truths, however, presumed that divine worship had its origin in the physical procreative process, as though the ancient Sages were incapable of imagining creation on any level until they saw babies being produced! They believe that the process of procreation was responsible for phallus worship. They argue that because of this the concept of Shakti emerged in the form of recognition of the contribution of commonness to continuity and the ultimate survival of the human race! This, however, is an erroneous and shallow concept.

A major stage was reached when cosmological wonder yielded place to organised religion. In the process, symbols began to acquire deeper religious significance and became objects of reverence and actual worship. As a part of this process, some of the common things, symbolically stated, came to be represented as tangible realities of everyday life. The lotus, for example, became the symbol of purity, subtlety, refinement and art.

The power associated with human beings and the victory of man over his known environment led to anthropomorphism. Man came to be looked upon as the highest being in the animal kingdom. God himself was imagined to possess the form of Man. This was followed by the concept of divine incarnations, for example, those of Shiva and Vishnu. Cosmic principles were visualised as Gods and goddesses in human form. People understood and revered them in accordance with the attributes associated with them.

Yet another stage in the development of religious thought came as a logical consequence of the preceding developments. Gods and Goddesses were now represented in the form of art, sculpture, dance, music etc. At this stage symbols acquired a still wider significance, becoming the main prop around which fine arts flourished. Ulti-

mately fine arts became an inalienable part of religion and ways of worship. The mythological archives of the Hindus began to grow. The Upnishads followed the Vedic patterns but the Mahabharata and other Puranas created a living world of symbols and legends in which the initiated delighted and sought to progress from untruth to truth, from darkness to light, from mortality to immortality.

असतो मा सद्गमय
तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय
मृत्योर्मा अमृतं गमय ।¹

asato ma sad gamaya
tamaso ma jyotirgamaya
mrityor ma amritam gamaya

These, in essence, are the brief outlines of the symbolic grandeur of the revealed Hindu mythological treasure-house.

1. *Shatapatha Brahmana* (शतपथ ब्राह्मण)

2

HINDU SPIRITUAL SYMBOLS —BEYOND THE FRONTIERS OF DOUBT

In an arduous quest for meaning, a bewildered American Hindu collected over a thousand snaps of a “peculiar, divine animal-God” from all over India. He looked at them curiously. They, with their numerous variations, emphasised one theme : A strange form, half man, half lion, challenging man’s perception and comprehension for understanding.

The American was a seeker. He laboured, drank deep into the authentic texts and found the glory and the majesty of the almighty symbolised through the image of “Narasimha”, the half-lion, half-man deity promising boundless gifts of human intelligence and the lion’s prowess to anyone who strove for them beyond one’s immediate barricaded mental horizon and bonds of flesh.

The meaning was a transcendental gift, a revelation, a dawn on the face of a darkened continent, a face-lift for reason by understanding, the climax of a journey through a tunnel into an illuminated expanse of emancipating experience of a spiritual fact. It was, as it were, peeling off of matter to reveal the triumphant spirit !

I met this remarkable American and fell in love with his purposefulness. I looked for people like him at home and abroad and reserved my love for them and their quest. I did not find many to demand that love. I felt disillusioned and began to look for inspiration.

Forms are matter. They are concrete representations. I reme-

numbered Tagore. He had said :

Thought (the abstract) craves for a physical expression into a perceptible form.

Form wants the freedom of abstract endlessness.

The limitless seeks the limits of form.

The limits want to merge in formlessness.

I wanted to journey through the world of spirit. It was peopled, as it were, with symbols living through Time into seeming eternity. I became a co-pilgrim with the American seeker. The present volume is the result of my search and experience. It is my own seeking self to which I directed my queries and their possible answers. Those in a similar quest, I somehow feel, are part of that pilgrim, "I". To them, that is, to myself, I directed the following QUESTIONS :

1. How do I reconcile myself to the highest philosophical doctrines enshrined in Hindu scriptures on the one hand and the crude forms of worship and myths on the other ?

2. Can intelligent people accept the worship of divinity in grotesque forms ?

3. Is much of Hinduism blind worship arising out of fear, or is there some deeper sense of spiritual light behind the overt forms of worship ?

4. Is there any contradiction in the Hindu's attitude when he worships so many Gods in so many forms ?

5. Many Puranic stories sometimes sound strange. How is it that even educated, intelligent people in India read them with a sense of unquestionable belief and awe and get inspiration from them ?

6. Can I find any basis for such faith in Hindu religious symbols and those seemingly irrational scriptural stories ?

7. Why was the great wisdom of the Hindus so enthusiastically diluted with fanciful stories and contradictory forms of expressions and worship ?

8. Do symbols—like those of Ganesha and Shiva Linga—and fantastic stories like that of Hanuman spanning the ocean in a big leap forward detract me from the truths of an elevating religion ?

9. I grant, for the sake of argument, that these symbols have some scientific basis. But would not worshipping them without knowing their meaning harm my rational mind ?

10. In the fast life of modern times, what is the relevance of long ritualistic worship of the countless forms of Gods and Goddesses such as those I see in India ?

11. Many western scholars have gone deep into Hindu scriptures and found that there is a jumble of ideas contradicting one-another. Isn't it unhealthy for the growth of the ideas contained in the scriptures to let such a conglomeration perpetuate itself ?

12. Would it not offend the worshipper if I questioned him on the relevance of his faith, the meaning of the rituals he was following and the alternatives to his ways of religious life ?

13. How is it that in Hinduism there are so many names and forms of one Supreme God ?

14. Would not the worship of so many Gods and Goddesses, and acceptance of Hinduism in toto, mean acceptance of polytheism and abandonment of the composite vision of higher Hindu philosophy?

I am in a tunnel. I am told at the end of this tunnel is light. I am fighting for an identity. I am told at the end of this fight is victory.

Shall I win ? Can I win ? What shall I win ? And how shall I win ?

The questions are a myriad streams. The answer is one big ocean. But here again we come to symbolism. Let us begin at the beginning. Our immediate concern is the concept of *Symbols*.

A symbol is a conventional sign employed to convey a meaning and is to be distinguished from impromptu, unintentional or accidental signs. Objects and even gestures are sometimes employed as symbols, for example a bishop's crozier or a soldier's salute. Civilized man characteristically employs graphic or written symbols, of which an enormous number and variety are in common use. Examples are afforded by the letters of any alphabet which are symbols standing for uttered sounds.

Special subjects of study, like science and music, have their own

codes of symbols and these are usually internationally recognised. The "letter symbols" are borrowed from alphabets and endowed with special meanings, but others have unique forms.

An organised study of symbols takes us to another concept, that of *Symbolism*.

Symbolism is the representation of something moral or spiritual by something natural or material. The lion is a symbol of courage; the lamb, of meakness or patience. Symbols include types, enigma, parables, fables, allegories, emblems, heiroglyphics etc. Some readily suggest the object which they represent; others seem in no way related to it, the connection perhaps being lost due to some long-forgotten association of ideas. The forms of Christian ritual, and the fabric and architecture of churches and mosques are full of symbolic meaning. In Christian theology, every sacrament is an outward and visible sign or symbol of an inward and spiritual grace, but the denominations vary in their views as to the interpretation of the symbols. Roman Catholics hold that the sacraments actually perform spiritually what they symbolise; extreme Protestants regard the sacraments as no more than symbols.¹

To sum up, *a symbol is the objective representation of a subjective idea*. For that purpose various media like poetry, story, idol, painting, sculpture, mudra (poses), abhinaya (acting), yantra (incantation), tantra (mystical spiritual practices) have been used from time immemorial. In whatever form they are used, real significance comes out of the proper understanding of the symbols.

In our age science has begun to enter the realms of philosophy. The spirit of enquiry has prevailed. The human mind is becoming more and more anxious to solve the mysteries beyond simple questions of mass, weight and motion. There may be people fully lost in matter. There are also many all over the world who are anxious to find answers to perplexing questions of life, death and universal consciousness. I have come in contact with such people over the last twenty-two years or so. They have asked me time and again what the Hindu deities represent.

1. A.N. Whitehead : "*Symbolism*", 1928 ; E. Bevan, "*Symbolism and belief*" 1937; A. Farrar : "*A Rebirth of Images*" 1949.

Thanks to science, our minds have again started seeing beyond the immediate realities. There is greater hope now than in the near past to realise the unseen—the truths that lie hidden in these symbols.

Most of the symbols of Hinduism are derived from the Vedas. Symbolism is an important way in India for realisation of divine knowledge. The object behind the Vedic principles and this science is the same.

But this science has not been laid down, principle-wise, openly, in any of the Indian scriptures. It has to be patiently, devotedly and humbly studied. It needs careful sorting and weeding.

My methodology of the study of the science of symbols falls under the following classification : (i) History (ii) Necessity (iii) Motivation (iv) Disposition of the analyst (v) Types (vi) Hindu Gods and Goddesses (vii) The future of this science.

I have tried to cast off my own inherited notions in favour of logical facts.

I have been constantly aware of the fact that the world has never been without wisdom or teachers. The degree and the manner in which wisdom has been imparted and understood have varied according to the capacity of those who have received it. We find the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Puranas in a sequence. Thinkers knew that the technique of imparting wisdom has to change with the times and with the qualities of men at different points of time. They did not only clothe philosophical wisdom with stories, symbols and allegories, but also gave ideas in forms and figures which provided help in grasping the essential meanings.

To understand the language of symbols one has to attune oneself with the one who evolved it. Even Woodroffe has recognised that “symbols are naturally misunderstood by those to whom the beliefs they typify are unfamiliar, and who differ in temperament from those who have evolved them. To the ordinary Western mind the symbols of Hinduism are often repulsive and absurd. It must not, however, be forgotten that some of the symbols of Western faiths have the same effect on the Hindu. From the picture of the ‘Slain Lamb’ and other symbols in terms of blood and death he naturally shrinks in disgust.

“Those differences are likely to exist so long as men vary in mental attitude and temperament, and until they reach the stage in which, having discovered the essential truths, they become indifferent to the mode in which they are presented.”

There are many opinions about and explanations of such symbols. Even famous idols and images vary on the point of detail. My effort in this book is to suggest coherent, cogent and logical meanings of some basic Hindu symbols, basing my interpretations on traditional views, philology, comparative philosophy and trends in modern psychology. I shall feel rewarded if this little work is successful in arousing interest in the enquiring minds to see beyond the apparent meanings not only in the Hindu religion but in all the religions of the world. I feel convinced that the world beyond man-made religions and denominational loyalties is the world of truth which pervades all beings.

Instead of referring the reader repeatedly to various works, I have given a detailed list of source material and a glossary of some important Sanskrit words and terms. These, I hope, will encourage the reader to deepen his impressions of Hindu deities and Hinduism.

Let us begin our study with the analysis involved in the symbols pertaining to ‘The Male Trinity’ and then ‘The Female Trinity’.

3

COMPLEMENTARY TRINITY

Hindu scriptures have laid down from time immemorial that the Supreme God known as Brahman, who is Nirguna (beyond all attributes), Nishkriya (beyond all activity), Nirakara (formless) and Niranjana (unattached), activates himself with the help of his three powers and performs three different functions—creation, sustenance, destruction. Because of the different functions performed by the power of the Supreme, he comes to be known by three different names—Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra. The powers, with the help of which he activates himself, are known as Mahasaraswati, Mahalakshmi and Mahakali. The power of Brahma which creates is known as Mahasaraswati, the power of Vishnu which sustains is known as Mahalakshmi and the power of Rudra which destroys is known as Mahakali.

The three functions of the Supreme can be discussed from two different angles ; one is historical and chronological and the other spiritual and psychological. From the chronological point of view things are first created, then they are maintained and then ultimately they are destroyed. Thus, we have first the Creator, Brahma. Then comes the sustainer, Vishnu. The destroyer Rudra is the third personification.

From the spiritual standpoint, the order is reversed. The doctor first destroys the disease and then takes steps to maintain the health of the person who was once sick. He gives tonics for physical

restoration and maintenance of good health. First he is acting as Rudra, in the second instance as Vishnu and lastly as Brahma. The same is true of spiritual teachers. They first destroy the ignorance of the aspirant to spiritual light. Then they take care to maintain the knowledge present in the aspirant. Later they strengthen the knowledge in the mind of the aspirant and also instil fresh knowledge. First they act as Rudra, then as Vishnu and lastly as Brahma.

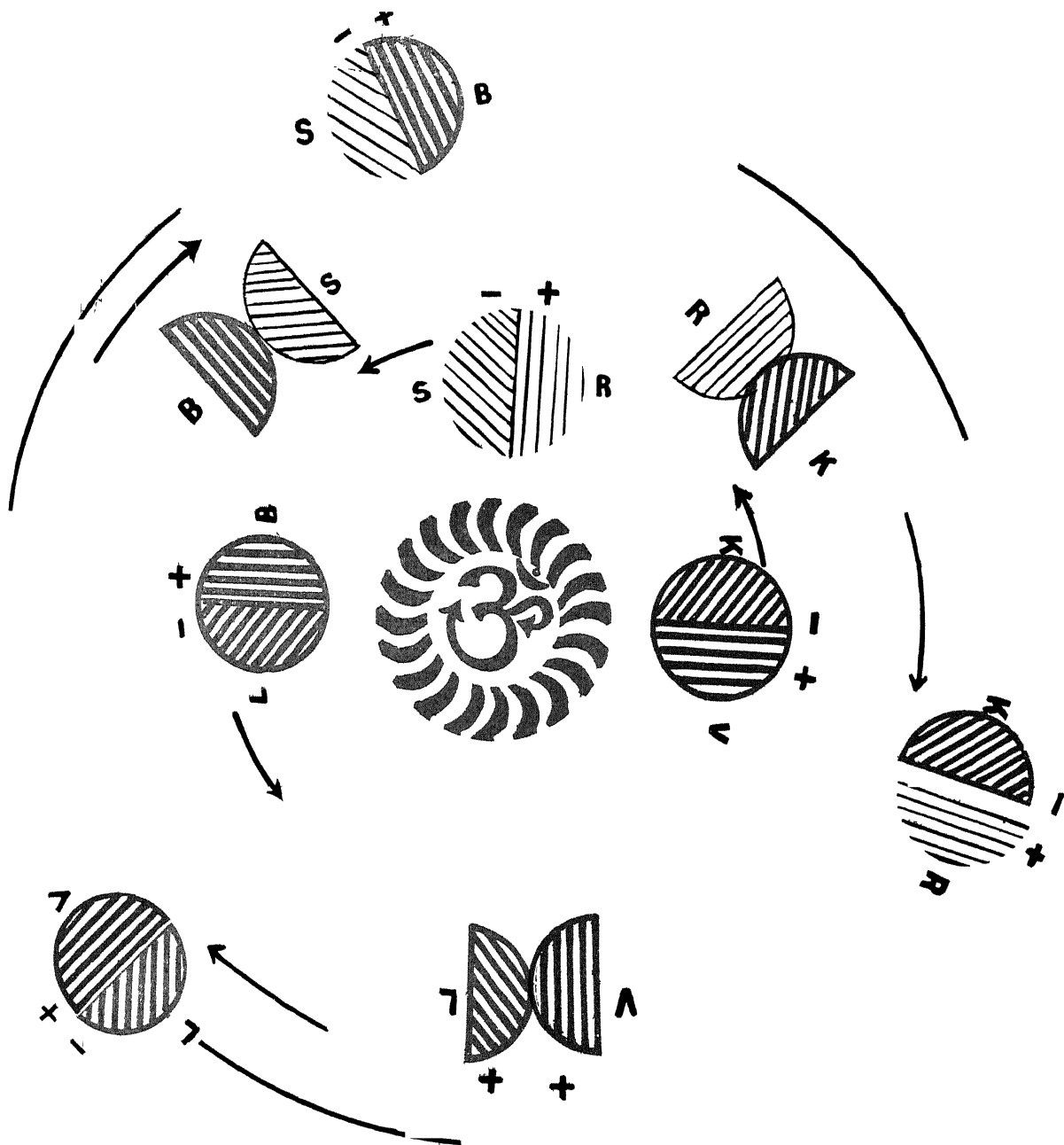
This principle can be applied to all fields of activity. First, evil has to be eradicated. In so doing, good has to be protected and preserved. When we get rid of evil, good has to be strengthened and promoted.

The goal is total evolution. The above-mentioned functions are the three primary functions of the Supreme. The scriptures suggest that there is an inter-relationship between these three functions which the thinkers of the orient have tried to objectify. Let us look at the colours ascribed to the Trinity and their consorts :

Rudra (Shiva)	Saraswati	White
Vishnu	Mahakali	Blue
Brahma	Lakshmi	Golden-red

There seems to be some affinity indicated by the similarity of colours. They are of the same origin. In some places it is mentioned that Kali is the objective aspect of Vishnu who is himself subjective. She becomes the consort of Rudra. Likewise Lakshmi is the objective aspect of Brahma. She becomes the consort of Vishnu. Saraswati is the objective aspect of Rudra. She becomes the consort of Brahma. The scriptures say that in reality there is no contradiction in their functions. Their activities are complementary. They all work in a team to carry out the will of the Supreme (Virat).

An ancient legend says that when the Supreme Brahman (Virat) thought of creating the world, “एकोऽहं बहु स्याम्” (Ekoham Bahu syam) “I am one ; let me be many.” Brahma, golden red, appeared from his right side; Vishnu, blue, from the left and Rudra; white, from the middle of his person. As desired by the Supreme, Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra started functioning. Brahma started creating the world, Vishnu maintaining it and Rudra destroying it. Soon they became tired. They could not keep up the tempo. They prayed to the Supreme and expressed their difficulty :



“शिवः शक्त्या युक्तो यदि भवति शक्तः प्रभवितुम् ।”²

(Shivah Shaktya yukto yadi bhavati Shaktah Prabhavitum)

God combined with his power is capable of functioning and not without it.

The Supreme again created three powers in the same sequence, i.e. Lakshmi, who was golden-red from the right, Mahakali, who was blue from the left, and Saraswati, who was white from the middle. The Supreme gave these powers to Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra respectively and said, “you are like brothers and sisters, being of the same origin.” The Supreme further willed that these powers would be united—Saraswati with Brahma, Lakshmi with Vishnu and Kali with Rudra, and function in unision to carry the creation forward³

As explained above, chronologically, the movement is from Brahma through Vishnu to Rudra. From the spiritual standpoint, the movement is from Rudra to Vishnu, from Vishnu to Brahma, and then from Brahma to Rudra. Their powers are shown with a different charge i.e. (—) to their principal part shown as (+) in circle (i) in the illustration. They establish their relationship in the anti-clock-wise direction, to their subjective part or the positive charge close to them. Saraswati becomes the consort of Brahma, and helps him create the world. Lakshmi becomes the consort of Vishnu and helps him sustain the creation. Kali becomes the consort of Rudra and helps him purge it of the negativities that crop up in the process. This is shown in circle (ii). The balanced relationship is shown in circle (iii). As shown in the sketch, the “Shaktis” or the consorts of the Trinity have double movement. They go to their consorts, help them perform their function and return to their position of kinship to coordinate. Kali goes to Vishnu, Lakshmi to Brahma and Saraswati to Rudra if help is needed in carrying forward the process of evolution. For evolution, the creation has to be maintained. The maintained creation has to be cleansed. Evils that crop up in that process have to be destroyed. The cleansed and refreshed creation goes to Brahma who evolves it further. Thus the process goes on.

Mahakali, whose function is “destruction”, is shown in deep

2. *Saundarya Lahari*—Shankaracharya

3. *Narada Maha Purana, Tripura Rahasya, Mahatmya Khanda*, chapter 10, Shloka-148-151. (Purvabhaga-Prathama Pada)

blue verging on black. She is shown in a fierce form. She, with her consort Rudra, performs the function of destruction not for the sake of destruction but for cleansing the creation. She removes the dispensable part and passes the process on to Vishnu, her brother. Then Vishnu with his prosperous and rich consort, Lakshmi, (symbolic colour: golden-red) performs the function of sustenance not only for the purpose of maintenance but also for multiplication and evolution. She, after taking good care of the creation, passes it on to her brother, Brahma. Brahma, with his consort Saraswati (symbolic colour ; white) representing purity and knowledge, helps in the furtherance of the creative process. This is not enough in itself for total evolution. She ensures that during the process of creation and multiplication if any disability or disease crops up or some evil creeps in, it must be removed. She passes it on to Rudra for further cleansing.

This whole process is carried on for the total and healthy evolution of the creation. That is why we find that another very popular name for Rudra is "Shiva" which means blessedness or benevolence. There means well-being even in destruction as the well-being of a person is involved in removing in unmaintainable, dangerous part of the body, which, if not amputated in right time, may endanger his life. In that case removal or destruction is an invertible, beneficial act.

Philosophers all over the world have tried to explain the process of creation from different angles. They have set up their own trinities for this purpose. Some take Shukla (white), Rakta, (red) and Mishra (Mixed) as the basis. Some employ prakasha (light), vimarsha (source of light) and samvit (fusion) as their trinity. Some explain it from the standpoint of Icchha (desire), Kriya (action) and jnana (knowledge).

Unwittingly the arguments get hot and it seems as if they are conflicting with one another. But that is not the right thing. Once we are able to appreciate that they are complementary, there is hardly any scope for any conflict. The purpose of the Supreme is to enforce unity in diversity.

PART II

THE MALE TRINITY

Chapter IV BRAHMA — The Creator

Chapter V VISHNU — The Sustainer

Chapter VI SHIVA — The Benefactor



BRAHMA

4

BRAHMA

Brahma is the creator of the universe, according to popular Hindu belief. He represents Rajoguna, the essence of the creative force.

The Mundakopanishad describes him as “the first of the Gods, the creator of the universe and preserver of the world.”

ब्रह्मा देवानाम् प्रथमः समवभूत् विश्वस्य कर्त्ता भुवनस्य गोप्ता ।

“BRAHMA devanam prathamah samavabhut
Vishvasya karta bhuvanasya gopta.”

Brahma’s personality has two aspects : the Absolute Brahman and the presiding deity of Rajoguna. The creator has been described in the Vedas as “Vishvakarma” (motive and power of the world), Brihaspati’ (the great teacher), ‘Hiranyagarbha’ (the precious womb of the universe), ‘Prajapati’ (the benefactor of his subjects) and ‘Brahma’ (the ultimate being).

A well-known story from the scriptures says : Lord Vishnu is lying on the bed of the great divine snake, Sheshanaga. Sheshanaga is coiled up in the form of a bed with his thousand heads spread like an umbrella. This bed is floating in the “Kshira Sagara” (ocean of milk) which is clear and calm. A thousand-petal lotus is almost covering the bed. On this bed, the Lord is lying in an attentive posture. One of his arms is supporting his head. His appearance shows deep thinking and full alertness.

He is in a neutral state : ‘yoga nidra’. He is neither sleeping,

nor awake. His consort, Lakshmi, is gently pressing his feet. In that state, it is said, there arose a divine vibration 'ikshana' (ईक्षण), in the Lord. 'Ekoham bahu syam' (एकोहम् बहु स्याम्). "I am one, let me be many," He willed. In that state of inner movement and churning, there arose a lotus stem from the navel region of the Lord. On that a beautiful figure appeared in a sitting posture, with the four Vedas in four hands. The figure had four heads.

This allegory has a very deep philosophical significance. I would just hint at a few salient points here.

Many connotations have been ascribed to this mythological story. Some have tried to interpret this from a political angle, some from an economic angle, some from the standpoint of worldly desires. I shall deal with one of such meanings here. The snake symbolises time. Lying on the snake suggests that during the course of our day-to-day effort to maintain ourselves, we must save something (Shesha meaning surplus). Lakshmi, pressing the feet of the Lord, suggests that one should keep working for prosperity. Prosperity should encourage but not inebriate a person. The word prosperity here has to be taken in a broader sense as physical, mental and spiritual achievement and not in the ordinary sense as acquisition of more money etc. (for details see the chapter on Lakshmi). With the "ikshana" in the Supreme, the movement was set in and the change started. The potential energy lying dormant became active, kinetic energy. Speed brought up the mutation and combination and from the centre arose the "kamalanala" (the stem of the lotus). On this kamalanala appeared a beautiful, thousand-petal lotus. On this lotus Brahma appeared in a sitting posture, holding the four Vedas in his four hands.

Kalivilas Tantram, a venerated Hindu religious treatise,¹ says :

अरुणादित्यसंकाशं चतुर्वक्त्रं चतुर्मुखम् चतुर्वेदमयं देव धर्मकामार्थमोक्षदम् ।

Arunaditya-Sankasham chaturvaktram chaturmukham
Chaturvedamayam devam dharmakamarthamokshadam.

"Like the newly born sun he is red. He has four heads and four faces representing the four Vedas. He bestows Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. Lord Brahma is the bestower of liberation."

1. London, 1917, Patal 20, shlok 12.

Brahma, as the presiding deity of Rajoguna, the active principle of the Supreme, activates both satva and tamasa. His name is "Abjayoni". He is said to have been born of a lotus. This lotus rises out of the navel of Vishnu. When there is movement or vibration in the Omnipresent and the all-pervading immortal spirit, it takes the form of a 'bindu' (a dot), a nucleus. From there the *Mulastambha* of the Shakta and the "kamalanala" of the Vaishnavas rise.

The principal symbols used by iconographers and artists to depict Brahma are given below :

The four faces	four basic sources of knowledge, (The Rig, Yajuh, Sama and Atharva Vedas)
The four arms	Omnipotence
The human form	attunement with human beings
Rosary in the upper right hand	necessity of the repetitive pattern, time (kala)
A book in the upper left hand	medium of knowledge
Protecting pose (lower right hand)	protection
Kamandalu in the lower left hand	container of primeval water
Golden face	creative activity (Rajoguna)
White beard	antiquity
Garments in off-white colour	piety and impurity
Crown	sovereignty
Yajnopavita	discipline
Lotus seat	evolution with knowledge
Right foot resting on a lotus	active discriminating contact with the world
Hamsa as carrier	power of discrimination

The Four Faces

This is the most prominent feature of the Brahma image. The faces suggest that the knowledge contained in the universal mind is of

four basic types, i.e. Dharma (duty), Artha, (material resources), Kama (desire) and Moksha (liberation). All knowledge relating to these basic types is said to be contained in the four Vedas i.e. Rig, Yajuh, Sama and Atharva. So the four faces can be said to be representing the four Vedas. This knowledge is for all times. So it can be said that the four faces also symbolise the four Yugas (division of time). They represent the four Varnas (functional classification of the people) as Brahmans (the priest and teachers), Kshatriyas (the warriors), Vaishyas (the tradesmen) and Shudras (working class). In short, the four faces convey that the universal mind contains all knowledge concerning all and for all times.

In some books, it is said that the "eastern face" of Brahma represents the Rigveda, the "southern face", the Yajurveda, the "western face", the Samaveda and the "northern face", the Atharvaveda. This has its own significance. We need not get into the minute details at this stage of our enquiry.

The Four Arms

They represent the four directions. This is the usual symbol to convey the idea of omnipotence and omnipresence. Brahma has to be omnipotent and omnipresent to give this universe a harmonious shape, form, and a clear direction. To keep this huge universe in motion, you can well imagine, how much power is required. To put a small rocket into orbit, scientists need so much energy. No computer can comprehend the power needed to run the universe. No mind can conceive it. Whether it is a computer of the human mind or anything else, it forms part of the creation and cannot measure the total energy behind it. A creature cannot judge his Creator. No driver can ever be run over by his own car. The moment he gets down to be run over by his car, he ceases to be the driver and so long as he is the driver, he cannot be run over by the car which is being driven by him. The two frontal arms symbolise activity in the objective or manifest world and the two back arms represent activity in the subjective or the unmanifest world.

The Human Form :

The creator is in tune with the highest form of his creation—the human being. He himself has been represented in a human form.

Rosary in the Upper Right Hand :

As many other religious depictions, the rosary is suggestive of the pattern of time through which the world moves from creation through sustenance to its dissolution for a new creation. This rosary has 108 beads. This is indicative of elements used in the creation. These elements in the form of a rosary suggest a method and a system. The position of the hand indicates that it is moving the rosary. This symbolises the active and systematic use of the elements in the creation of the world. The rosary is held in the right hand which is shown in a higher position. The right side is the sun side and is known to be intelligence-dominated. The upper position suggests its importance. The back position suggests its subjectivity. In all, this hand and the position of the rosary symbolise an intelligent use of the elements which is of paramount importance for the creation of a harmonious world.

A Book in the Left Upper Hand :

Book symbolises knowledge. The left hand stands for emotional importance. The upper position suggests such importance. It connotes that knowledge is important but it has to be utilised with gentleness. If we had kept this advice in view, knowledge and scientific advancement would have never threatened the existence of man as they are doing today. So long as man would keep on using his knowledge for his own selfish ends, chaos and tension would rule the scene of life.

Lower Right Hand in a Protecting Position :

This mudra is known in the scriptures as “Abhaya mudra”—the protecting pose. The right hand indicates right conduct—conduct arising out of correct knowledge. The lower hand suggests activity in the manifest world. In short, this pose of the right hand suggests that the Lord shall protect all those who will follow the right path.

Kamandalu in the Lower Left Hand :

The kamandalu in the left frontal hand of Brahma contains Amrita. It has a big opening for filling but a small outlet. The kamandalu with Amrita symbolises vitalising energy—the nectar by which the whole universe was brought into being. Its big inlet and

small outlet suggest the controlled and systematic distribution of divine energy. Its position on the left side indicates that this function is dominated by love and gentleness for the good of the creation.

Writing about it E.B. Havell says that it is the “water pot, the kalasha or the kumbha which held the creative elements, or the nectar of immortality churned by gods and demons from the Cosmic Ocean.”

This also represents the “Amritatva” (immortality) of the Upanishads, the “Nirvana” (salvation) of the Buddha and the “Anandatatva” (Supreme joy) of the Vedantins.

Golden Face :

It symbolises the active principle—the universal mind in action. It represents Rajoguna. Without this activity, no creation can take place. When not in action Brahma is known as Purna Brahma. When in action, He is the presiding deity of all gunas (faculties, material elements, etc.).

The White Beard :

The white beard represents antiquity. The process of creation is going on from time immemorial.

Dusty-White Garments :

The dusty aspect suggests impurity and the whiteness suggests purity and piety. They connote that this creation is dualistic in nature. It is a mixture of pairs of opposites like good and bad, up and down, day and night etc.

The Crown :

The crown signifies sovereignty.

The Lotus Seat :

This lotus is red and white. It represents evolution.

The scriptures say :

प्रकृतिमयपत्र विकारमयकेसर-सविन्नालादि-विशेषणशील पद्मम् ।

Prakritimayapatra-vikaramayakesara-samvinnaladivisheshanasilam padmam.”²

“Nature is its leaves, change is its pollen and consciousness its placenta. Lotus is naturally stable and full of conscious beauty.”

One of the Upanishadas says :

पद्मविशं करे स्थितम्³ “Padmavisham kare sthitam”

The Universe is on the palm of Vishnu in the form of a lotus.

Elucidating the lotus theme, E.B. Havell says :⁴

“The bell-shaped fruit was the mystic Hīranyagarbha, the womb of the universe, holding the germ of the world’s innumerable still unborn. The lotus was the seat and footstool of the gods, the symbol of the material universe, and of the heavenly spheres above it. It was the symbol of all Hinduism as the *mehrab* was for all Islam.”

Its red and white colours symbolise activity and purity. The number of petal according to Tantric treatises is 12, relating it with the twelve kalas (phases) of the Sun. This is further confirmed by the special characteristic of the lotus. It opens up in the morning and closes in the evening, then opens with the rising Sun again. From the standpoint of astrology, it has its relationship with the nine “grahas” in the Zodiac. Each petal of the lotus functions in nine different ways. This also has its bearing on the number of beads (108) in the rosary held in the right hand of Brahma.

Yajnopavita :

The sacred thread shown on the body of Brahma symbolises disciplined activity within the three gunas—satva, rajas and tamas. Activity is not whimsical but guided by the laws of creation. Even the gods are not beyond laws. So how can their creation be beyond them ? The yajnopavita has three threads made into one by a certain number of knots and it is of a certain specified length. All this has a *definite* philosophical significance.

The Right Foot Resting on the Lotus :

This posture symbolises an active and discriminating contact with the world. The left leg is folded and placed on the seat. Contact with the world for creation and maintenance is not to be guided

3. *Gopalo ttarata pinyupanisahd Shlok*-26. गोपालोत्तरतापिन्युपनिषत्, श्लोक-२६

4. Indian Architecture London 1913, Chapter II.

by emotions but by discrimination and knowledge. There lies the secret of evolution.

Hamsa (Swan) :

Hamsa, primarily, is a symbol of the power of discrimination and beauty. Its white colour suggests purity. On the higher plane, it signifies the selective instinct and the force of life (pranashakti) with the help of which Brahma vitalises and runs the universe.

Brahma, in the Puranas, has been described as one who is easily moved to grant boons. There are a number of stories in the Puranas where Brahma is said to have granted boons to Asuras (Rakshasas or demons) who later became a source of danger to the Devas (Gods). The Devas had to rush to Vishnu to save them from the Asuras who had become invincible because of the power bestowed upon them by Brahma.

Why should Brahma grant boons which would endanger the existence of His own divine entities ?

Such stories have a deeper philosophical meaning. It will be out of place to explain them here. It should suffice to state that granting of boons is in keeping with the creative principle of God who has to, by His own laws, reward tapasya (penance) by boons. Vishnu, as the preserver of the universe, has to save the divine forces in order to maintain the balance in the creation.

In the scriptures, Brahma is the personification of the creative power. He is considered to be the creator of the world in every new cycle of existence—after each dissolution. Before anything is created, it has to be planned. Planning is the function of the intellect. A plan has to be drawn. A form has to be decided. Materials have to be provided. All this is Brahma's work. The scriptures call Him the "Universal Mind", the mind which draws a full map of creation and prepares prototypes, like those of the solar system, its function and field of activity, and formulates laws governing all such systems.

This creation is the result of Divine Ideation. This ideation unfurls itself in terms of time and space. Different levels of consciousness give it different names and forms. Evolution flows on and

we see this great drama unfolding into a colourful panorama. This is so enchanting that souls lose their mark and get lost in festive environments. Then starts the eternal play of hide and seek with its resultant joys and sorrows.

The scriptures show the way to liberation but who follows it ? Only those, who get sick with unending swing of sorrows and joy, pain and pleasure, follow it. Once one decides to take the right path earnestly, the goal of liberation comes near.

We don't find much literature on Brahma and there are only a few temples of Brahma in India. An important one is situated in Pushkara (Rajasthan).

Brahma is mentioned in some scriptures riding a chariot driven by seven swans. Number seven is considered sacred in almost all religions. Here seven swans may be said to represent the "seven primary rays of the sun", the seven colours in the light spectrum etc.

They are also said to represent the seven aspects detailed in a Vedic Mantra : (i) Bhuh, (ii) Bhuvah, (iii) Swah, (iv) Mahah, (v) Janah, (vi) Tapah, (vii) Satyam.



5

VISHNU

Vishnu is a Vedic God. He is a member of the Trinity comprising Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva—the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer.

In the Vedas, Vishnu is identified with the Sun and is said to have measured the seven regions of the universe and covered its whole expanse in three steps—later associated with his Vamana (dwarf) form. (Vamana is said to be one of the ten incarnations of Vishnu). The explanation given to these three steps (tripada) refers to the three different positions of the Sun in morning, noon and evening. This indicates “the solar origin of Vishnu”.

The special character of Vishnu, as the preserver of the Universe and the sustainer of mankind, has been outlined in the “Shatapath Brahmana”, a Sanskrita treatise of much value. Vishnu, as the ‘model God of kings and commoners alike,’ has a prominent place in Rigvedic hymns.

The word “Vishnu” is derived from a Sanskrita root which gives it the connotation of the Absolute Spirit, the spirit which pervades the moving and the static, the living and the lifeless, the seen and the unseen world. According to the scriptures, that which is present in every atom of the creation, that which is the life-centre of all activity, that Supreme Reality which pervades the microcosm and the macrocosm, is Lord Vishnu. That Pure Consciousness which manifests itself through body, mind and intellect as perceiver, feeler,

thinker and experiencer of this world of objects, emotions and thoughts is called Vishnu. विवेष्टि व्याप्नोति चराचर जगत् सः विष्णुः VIVESHTI VYAPNOTI CHARACHARAM JAGAT YAH SAH VISHNUH ”

According to traditional and scriptural concepts, the following are the main Vishnu symbols :—

<i>Symbols</i>	<i>Meanings</i>
1. The Blue-sky background:	All-pervasiveness, purity, vastness.
2. Shesha Naga with a thousand hoods	Endless time.
3. The two coils of Shesha used as a seat.	Manifest and unmanifest phenomena.
4. The four arms.	Omnipotence, all-pervasiveness, and Dharma (Duty) Artha (Material resources) Kama (Desire) Moksha (Liberation)
5. The two frontal arms.	The manifest world.
6. The two back arms.	The unmanifest world.
7. The blue body.	Omnipresence.
8. Shankha (Conch Shell)	Cosmic sound.
9. Chakra (Revolving missile)	Cycle of movement.
10. Gada (Mace)	Kinetic energy.
11. Padma (Lotus)	Evolution through detachment.
12. Pitambar (yellow garment)	Everything good and auspicious.
13. Vijayanti Mala (A Garland of Cana flowers)	Victory of truth.
14. Koustubha Mani (a kind of gem)	Capacity to fulfil beneficial wishes.
15. The Sitting Posture	Strict laws.
16. Kshira Sagara (The ocean of milk)	Unlimited goodness.

<i>Symbols</i>	<i>Meanings</i>
17. The crown	Sovereignty.
18. Ear-rings.	Pair of opposites.
19. A foot-mark on the chest.	Love for the devotee.
20. Garuda (eagle)	Periodic, cyclic time.

The Blue Sky

The background seen in Vishnu pictures is that of a spotless blue sky which is both vast and calm. This represents peace, purity, stability and vastness. Blue is a spiritual colour and is there to represent divine qualities. It has a very soothing quality.

Shesha Naga :

Vishnu is shown seated on Shesha Naga. The word “Shesha” here means “Unending remainder”—something which has survived a deduction or a division. It is the remainder which shall ever remain. Naga, literally snake, is meant to convey two different meanings in two different contexts. In one, it would mean Space, and the other Time. Space, in scriptural language, is called Akasha (sky). A thousand hoods add to it a superlative significance. Shesha Naga is seen standing with its hoods open over the head of the Lord. It has a thousand protruding tongues and a thousand brilliant Jewels shining on a thousand heads. This, as a whole, symbolises the principle of activity behind the Sky or Time.

Shesha, with a thousand hoods, is also related to the Sahasra Chakra, which, in yogic parlance, is known as the highest state in the evolution of consciousness. Its physical representation has been made through a thousand-petal lotus in full bloom.

The Two Coils of Shesha :

These two coils on which Lord Vishnu is shown seated, in the space context, would mean घटाकाश(Ghatakasha) and महाकाश(Mahakasha) or conditioned space and unconditioned space. I shall give an example to clarify these two terms. The space inside a vessel is Ghatakasha (limited space, bound in a vessel) and the space outside the vessel is Mahakasha. Break the vessel and Ghatakasha will

merge into Mahakasha. Lord Vishnu sits on both "Akashas" meaning that he is controlling the manifest as well as the unmanifest world. Ghatakasha stands for the manifest world and Mahakasha for the unmanifest world.

When Shesha is taken in the context of Time, it means Absolute Time. Some thinkers give even greater weight to this symbol. They point out that a snake coils around its victim and leaves when its victim is dead—meaning thereby that its coil is fatal. The coil of time falls heavily on its victim. No one can get out of it so long as he or she is living in a mortal body. Time is subservient to Lord Vishnu who is above the reach of the two coils on which He is seated. It represents both "visible and invisible time."

Some thinkers have co-related the snake symbol with kama (desire). They give a reason for this. A dominating desire in a person is to become one with the object sought by him. That is his achievement. The desire to have a car is only fulfilled when one has a car.

When a male and a female snakes are gripped by sexual desire, they coil "into each other" in such a way that one can easily mistake the male and the female ones as one. They remain in that position for a long time. This interpretation, if accepted, may bring kama to the level of sex, which is not true. Kama is a very wide term which includes all desires, whether worldly or non-worldly.

If this interpretation is stretched and adopted to symbolise kama, this will fit in with the Vishnu concept which will, in that case, mean that all desires are subservient to Him and He is their Master. It is His will to grant or refuse any boon. Desires have innumerable mouths, and all mouths shine brilliantly to lure. The coils used as the seat of the Lord would represent both gross and subtle desires. In some mythological depictions Lord Vishnu, with Lakshmi at His feet, conveys that enjoyments of all type are at His service. He is their master. A man who worships Vishnu is never possessed by possessions.

In Yogic parlance, there is another interpretation. The thousand hoods of Shesha represent the "Sahasra Chakra" which has the brilliance of a thousand Suns. There is a blue dot in the centre of the Sahasra Chakra. This dot symbolises Vishnu—the Supreme Lord.

The yogi has to reach that state which is above the “Ajna Chakra” (see the glossary). Only then he can have communion with Absolute Reality.

The Four Arms

As in the case of other gods, the four arms symbolise omnipotence. They also symbolise Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha and the four human virtues—unselfishness, tolerance, freedom from ego and *Agape*, that is spiritual love.

The two frontal arms represent the activity in the manifest world and the two back arms symbolise the activity in the unmanifest world. This should be kept in mind while discussing the objects in the four hands of the Lord.

The placing of the conch shell, the revolving missile, the mace and the lotus in the hands has been inspired by the distinction between the frontal and the back hands and the right and the left hands. The right side is said to be dominated by the qualities of the Sun (intellect-dominated) and the left side is dominated by the qualities of the Moon (heart-dominated).

The Blue Body

The blue colour of Vishnu’s body symbolises the divine qualities of Brahman—all-pervasiveness, purity, kindness, compassion and so on. “AKASHA SHARIRAM BRAHMA” (आकाशशरीरम् ब्रह्म) Brahma is sky-bodied.

Conch Shell

The conch shell is held in the left back upper hand. This is ‘Panchajanya’, meaning born out of, or generating the five elements—air, water, fire, ether and earth. It is “dakshinavarta”. Its anti-clockwise rings open to the right. The index finger of the Lord points upward.

As we have said earlier, the back hand represents the unmanifest world and the left side represents the emotional aspect of one’s personality. We will take up this symbol in that context.

The five elements of the Panchajanya’ are Iccha (will), Kriya (action), Jnana (knowledge), Prajna (wisdom), and Parasamvit,

which needs some explanation. This word is the combination of two words "Para" and "Samvit". *Para* means, objectivity plus subjectivity and *Samvit* means, "meeting of". The expression means knowledge that emanates from the fusion of the two.

'Dakshinavarta' indicates the unfolding of psychic powers leading to the enlightening evolution of consciousness. There is a hymn in the Rigveda which throws light on the significance of the word 'Panchajanya'. It begins with the words :

पाञ्चजन्या पुरोहिता तमीमहे महागयम् (यजुर्वेद)

"PANCHAJANYA-PUROHITAH TAMIMAHE MAHAGAYAM"

'Panchajanya' means five types or five different ways. 'Purohita' is composed of two parts. 'Pur' means 'the world' and 'Hita' means 'for the benefit of.' It means "for the benefit of the world." 'Tamimahe' means dispeller of ignorance ; 'Mahagayam' means the supreme path. Vishnu dispels our ignorance and takes us to the supreme path.

Right activity should remove pain from the world. It should be for the benefit of the whole world. This is supplementary to the social welfare concept in Hinduism : "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्). It means "the whole world is one family". Once this is accepted and practised, we will hardly have problems which we are facing today in our individualistic and acquisitive Society. This concept is at the core of Hindu social philosophy.

"Panchajanya" also points to the science of social life as enumerated in the following five faculties :

Samvedana	: Sympathy ;
Sahakarita	: cooperation ;
Saha-astitva	: co-existence ;
Sneha	: affection ;
Samata	: equality

These faculties, when inculcated in a human personality make him the fountainspring of peace. This will lead to a society where there will be everflowing "ANANDA", everlasting peace and no conflict. The Vishnu concept teaches us this. The explanation of 'dakshinavarta' points to the unfailing path shown by the Vishnu

symbols—the path of mental equilibrium, peace and salvation through ‘Sadhana’.

The conch shell¹ is in the back left hand of the Lord. ‘Back’ signifies activity in the unmanifest world or subjective nature. The left hand signifies heart-dominated activities. This means that the five faculties, which relate to the inner personality of man, are to be inculcated and practised with love and understanding.

The conch shell is held upward which is meant to convey the idea of evolution—movement towards a higher goal or activity for evolution.

The index finger pointing upwards adds further significance to this idea : One must act to remove ignorance from the world and take the supreme path of evolution through love and understanding.

CHAKRA :

‘Chakra’ means a round wheel. In the hand of the Lord, it is known as ‘Sudarshana Chakra’. The word Sudarshana is significant. It gives a clue to the qualities of this chakra. Sudarshana is composed of two words. ‘Su’ means beautiful, and includes all that can be called beautiful at the physical, intellectual and spiritual levels. ‘Darshana’ means vision. It signifies the capacity to see all that is good—a vision of goodness.

As Sudarshana chakra means the cycle of movement also, this term gives us the idea that the object of all movement or activity is to see good at all levels. When it comes to seeing good at all levels, it brings forth all the qualities of helpfulness and service. Before the Lord’s eyes, every one is equal ; there is no place for discrimination, no place for favouritism. His law is universal.

The Chakra also symbolises ‘energy in motion’, that is kinetic energy.

1. Mythologically, the conch shell is said to have been made out of a bone of the demon, Panchajanya, who was killed by Vishnu. In the Bhagwat Gita, a vivid description is given of various ‘shankhas’ (conch shells) used by the commanders assembled in the battle-field at Kurukshetra. The one blown by Lord Krishna was called ‘Panchajanya’ Its blowing meant a battle-call

This Chakra is moving around the index finger of the Lord. It is not touching the finger. No effort of the Lord is involved in this movement. This leads us to the conclusion that this energy in action is subservient to the will of the Lord and is at his command. The index finger in the centre of the wheel conveys final directive.

This Chakra in the rear right hand means two things, its subjective nature and strict laws. All objects have inner subjective backgrounds. The merciful Lord enforces his laws strictly but with due regard to our subjective limitations.

There are a number of stories in the Puranas which have thrown further light on this symbol. Sudarshana Chakra has been used by the Lord only in cases of sudden threats to the devout, like the "Gaja-Graha" crisis. An elephant was caught by a big crocodile. The elephant prayed to the Lord for help. The Lord rescued the elephant. Sudarshana Chakra used in such cases corroborates the meaning given above. This unfailing weapon fights evil. But the requisition for this must be motivated by righteousness and must come from our inner depths. Those who will ask will receive; those who will seek will find.

In some places, Sudarshana Chakra has also been related to the mind, meaning thereby all desires and constant activity towards evolution. Both of these meanings clearly fit in the above explanation.

GADA (Mace) :

It symbolises energy in a static form—kinetic energy. It has been explained as हस्ते कौमोदमित्यवतु (haste kaumodamityavatu) "Koumoda Gada" is a mace made from a flower plant. This also symbolises the power of the Almighty.

The Right Lower and Frontal Hands :

The mace held in the right hand denotes contact with the manifest world. Its application is for evolution. It is applied not whimsically but rationally. The right hand points to the rightway.

The Corners Projecting out of the Round Formation :

In some pictures, the mace is eight-cornered and in some ten-cornered, the corners projecting out of its round formation. When

there are eight corners, it means 'ashtashri'. The word 'ashri' means corner or edge. 'Ashta' means eight—eight things :

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| (i) dharma : duty | (ii) Jnana : knowledge |
| (iii) viiag : detachment | (iv) aishvarya : wealth |
| (v) adharma : falsehood | (vi) ajnana : ignorance |
| (vii) aviraga : attachment | (viii) anaishvarya : poverty |

These are the eight factors symbolised by the mace. In the case of the gada with ten corners, the two remaining things are disha (direction) and vidisha (directionlessness) in life.

You will notice that there are four pairs in the first group and in the latter group they become five. These pairs are pairs of opposites. They mean conflict and also the Lord's power to resolve them.

LOTUS :

The fourth symbol held in the left lower hand (frontal) is a lotus. It is red with a white tinge. Redness stands for Rajoguna and whiteness for Satoguna. This lotus is not in full bloom. It is in the process of opening. Lotus stands for evolution. Its placing in the left lower frontal hand of the Lord connotes the force which keeps working in the world. "Be fully active but always act in a positive manner. With Satoguna, always move on towards righteousness and fairplay." This is the message. Lotus is also known as a symbol of detachment. It remains in water but is never handicapped by wetness. The meaning of this symbol is : Work in a detached manner for work will bring you the reward you deserve.

The Frontal Hand .

It symbolises the activity of the manifest world. It suggests : "Act in the world in such a way as to evolve yourself to perfection." This is the journey from without to within.

The Left Hand :

It is indicative of the tender approach to self. Don't be crude and harsh to yourself and to others in this process. Sadhana should be a means to attainment of perfection.

The stem of the lotus is long. It suggests that, even when in prosperity, we must not lose contact with the point of our origin. Our roots must be real and deep.

PITAMBARA (yellow garment) :

The Lord is shown dressed in yellow clothes. Yellow is an auspicious colour. It symbolises the qualities of spring—freshness and colourfulness. The Lord uses these sustaining qualities. Yellow clothes symbolise the Lord's love for His creation. He is ever young ever fresh, ever active, ever kind and ever gracious. He has taken numerous forms to sustain the creation. These forms are known as avatars (incarnations). As said in the Geeta, the Lord comes on this earth to save goodness and to establish dharma—the rule of Divine Law.

The Vijayanti Necklace :

This necklace is composed of a series of gems, each series in which has five gems in a particular order. It is described in the Vishnu Purana thus—"The Vishnu's necklae called Vijayanti is of five gems ; it consists of five elements. It is, therefore, called the "elemental necklace". Here number 5 points to the five different kinds of gems—pearl, ruby, emerald, sapphire and diamond".

"Vishnu Rahasya" says : "From the earth comes the blue gem (sapphire), from water the pearl, from fire the kaustubha ; from air the cat's eye and from ether the Pushparaga".

In some places, it means the victory of Truth, taking the word "Vijaya" for victory. This is also said to be made of Vijayanti flowers which are very delicate and pleasantly perfumed. This sweetness suggests accomplishments without unpleasantness, victory with love, and success through honest means. There is an interesting story in Hindu mythology. Narada, the ever-wandering god, became victorious over Kama, the Lord of Desire. He went ahead and started relating to everyone his triumph in heaven. He went and related his feat to Lord Shiva and boasted : "Oh Shiva, you had to burn Kama. I have defeated him alive." Shiva smiled and gave Narada a piece of advice : "It is all right. You have told me

all this. But it would be better if you don't say it in so many words to Vishnu. He cannot tolerate pride."

But Narada could not control his excitement. In spite of his efforts, one day he went to Vishnu and told him about his victory. The Lord listened to him but kept quiet. On his way back from Vishnu's place, Narada saw a very charming princess standing on the roof of her palace. He fell in love with her. He was seized by desire and wanted to marry her. The father of the princess told Narada that he was going to organise a large gathering of eligible men and his daughter would choose her husband from among them.

Narada went to Vishnu and asked Him to show him how to look most charming. Lord Vishnu said : "Your wish shall be fulfilled." Feeling happy, Narada came to the gathering and took a conspicuous seat. The princess came and passed by Narada. He got up and went ahead and took a front seat. She again did not notice him. The third time, he went and occupied a seat in the direction in which she was going. She ignored him again. He became very angry and asked : "Is there anyone more handsome than me ?"

The princess said : "Go and see your face in a Mirror." Filled with anger, he walked out of the congregation. Passing by the side of a tank, he saw the reflection of his face in water. It looked like the face of a monkey. He ran straight to Vishnu and cursed Him. Vishnu had caused the fall of Narada's pride.

Kaustubha Mani :

This gem decorates the neck of the Lord. The wearer of this, it is said, has all his desires fulfilled. Looking at it, the devotee gets the assurance that the Lord will see all his beneficial desires fulfilled. The Lord himself is the Kaustubha gem.

The Sitting Posture .

The right foot is shown dangling down. The left leg is folded on the seat. The Lord is sitting straight. This posture is significant. The right side is intellect-dominated and the left side is emotion-dominated. This position symbolises that Lord Vishnu as the sustainer of the world performs this function through knowledge. His

laws and strategy are all well planned and settled. There is no scope for compromises. The Sun has to rise at the determined time. He can't say : "I am tired; I shall come after an hour." The same is the case with the whole creation. Anyone, who shall break those laws shall suffer. All are equal in HIS judgement.

Kshira Sagara (Ocean of Milk) .

Kshira Sagara means the Ocean of Milk. It is calm and white in colour. Ocean here symbolises limitlessness or vastness. Milk symbolises prosperity. Its white colour indicates Satoguna (purity). Calmness indicates serenity. The milk of the Lord's love nourishes the creation with things that are good and pure. The Lord is infinite and so is His creation

The Crown :

It symbolises the idea of the Lord's majesty and sovereignty.

The Ear-Rings :

The ear-rings represent the pair of opposites comprising "kshara" and "akshara" destructible and non-destructible objects. All objects are subservient to Him.

The Foot-Mark :

This mark looks out of place on the beautiful form of the Lord. There is a story about it. Once Bhrigu, the rishi who was a great devotee of Vishnu, went to Him. He was stopped at the gate of his abode by the gate-keeper who said that the Lord was resting along with his consort, Lakshmi.

Bhrigu had never before experienced this type of restriction. He wanted to see Vishnu urgently. He became angry. He pushed the gate-keeper aside and dashed through the gate. He went straight to the place where the Lord was lying relaxed and Lakshmi was sitting at his feet. Bhrigu, without uttering a word, hit the Lord with his foot on the chest and called Him names.

Vishnu smiled. He caught hold of the foot of His devotee and started caressing it tenderly. He did not like his devotee to feel angry or hurt. He said that He would preserve this foot-mark on His chest as a constant reminder of the love of His devotees for Him.

This symbol suggests that the Lord loves His devotees many times more than they love Him. He says : “If you take one step towards me, I shall take ten towards you.” What an encouragement to those who wish to take refuge in Him !

Garuda :

The eagle is the carrier of the Lord. This bird has the capacity to see through long distances. It flies at a high speed and at great heights. It has strong wings. The Lord's eagle has a near-human form, a greenish face and a long twisted nose. It has green wings, and is shown sitting on the right side of the Lord with folded hands. It indicates the qualities a devotee should have in serving the Lord—a vision of spirituality, capacity to transcend the mundane barriers and a constant desire to serve the Master. The green colour indicates logicity.

Some thinkers have also treated it as a symbol of winged, periodic time.

The following are some important incarnations of Vishnu :

- | | | |
|------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| (1) Matsya | (2) Kurma | (3) Varaha |
| (4) Narasimha | (5) Vamana | (6) Parashurama |
| (7) Raghava Rama | (8) Krishna | (9) The Buddha and |
| (10) Kalki. | | |

Matsya :

In the Matsya incarnation, Vishnu is said to have rescued the Vedas and the nuclei of the universe from destruction, following a deluge by taking the form of a fish.

Kurma :

In the Kurma (tortoise) incarnation, the Lord supported Mount Mandara, used by the gods and the demons as churner when they churned the Ocean to obtain Amrita.

Varaha (“Boar”) :

In this ‘Boar’ incarnation, the Lord raised the earth above the waters of a deluge and saved it.

Narasimha :

The Lord assumed the face of a lion and the body of a human being. He saved his true devotee, Prahlada, from Hiranyakashyapu, Prahlada's father who symbolised unholy forces.

Vamana (dwarf) :

The Lord took this incarnation to save the gods from humiliation.

When the question of the partition of the universe arose between the gods and the demons and when it was stipulated that the area covered by three steps would be given to the gods, the Lord took the incarnation of a dwarf. That DWARF, in a miraculous feat, covered the whole universe only in two steps. There was nothing left to be covered by the third !

Parashurama :

In this incarnation, the Lord destroyed unruly groups of egoists as many as twenty one times. This had become necessary to show that ego must end in the interest of peace in the world.

Rama :

In this incarnation, the Lord laid down through action the ideals of Indian social and political life.

Krishna :

In this incarnation, the Lord acted as an ideal yogi. He symbolised ultimate wisdom and pleasing divine glory.

The Buddha :

This incarnation showed the importance of tolerance, non-violence and co-existence.

Kalki :

This incarnation is yet to come.

Lord Vishnu has been shown in different positions in Hindu scriptures. Some time we find him lying on the bed of Sheshanaga. His consort is seen pressing his feet. A lotus is rising from his navel on which we find Brahma sitting. Some time we find him standing, with his consort by his side. In this position, he is popularly known as Lakshmi Narayana. We find most of the Vishnu temples in India are called Lakshmi Narayana temples. This is probably because in this form people see greater scope for blessings, and fulfilment of their worldly desires through Vishnu. Vishnu, in essence, blesses all those who do right things in a right way.



6

SHIVA

—THE GOD OF DESTRUCTION

Shiva is one of the most popular Hindu Gods. He has been worshipped from time immemorial. History has a very limited recorded memory. The worship of Shiva was prevalent in many parts of the world. In the archaeological excavations in Mohenjodaro, two images of Devis and one of Lord Shiva have been found. Of the 360 images being worshipped in Arab lands, a very important place has been given to the image of Lord Shiva in black stone. Some archaeologists have taken the "Sang-e-Aswad" in Mecca as the Shiva Linga.

In the Sumerian Valley excavations, some images have been found which resemble the Shiva Linga. Images resembling the Shiva Linga have been found in Peru (South America) also. In Peru, God is called "Sibbu". This word is said to be derived from "Shiva". In Afghanistan, many images of Shiva and Ganesha have been found which seem to belong to the seventh century A.D.

Discoveries in Java and Sumatra also seem to suggest that in ancient times, Shiva's worship was prevalent there. We have four Shiva sects in India—Pashupati, Shaiva, Kaladamana and Kapalika. Kashmir's Pratyabhijna Darshan found a very important place among these sects.

Temples of Lord Shiva are found in all parts of India, right from extreme north in Kashmir, Amarnatha and Kailasha in Tibet to the South in Kanya Kumari (Cape Comorin) and Rameshvaram.

Shivaratri is one of the important festivals in India. The family of Lord Shiva is worshipped in this country. Out of the Trinity, Shiva is considered supreme by the Shaivites from the point of view that he, being the Lord of Destruction, destroys obstacles and helps the individual soul to merge in the Supreme. The seeker invokes his powers to get release from the bonds of ignorance.

Lord Shiva is the most popular member of the Trinity. Ganesha, his son, is worshipped first in most ceremonies in North India. Kartikeya, his other son, is the most popular God in the South. The Lord's consort, Parvati, is worshipped all over India in different names and forms—as “Durga”, “Gauri”, “Annapurna” and “Mahakali”. Shiva is also worshipped with the Ganges and the Moon. Being connected with Shiva, even snakes are worshipped. This shows the popularity of Shiva. He is considered to be most kind.

He bestows numerous boons upon his devotees. This is an interesting aspect. On the one hand, the crude job of destruction and on the other such magnanimity! India has known him as such. He inspires, cares for and protects his devotees.

The symbolism of Shiva is rich and profound. It depicts practically every philosophical concept of the highest spiritual significance. Occult truths relating to innermost mysteries of life have been represented in human forms. The practice of choosing the human form in representing different deities comes from the basic principle of Hindu symbolism.

प्रसिद्ध साधर्म्यं साध्यसाधनम् उपमानम्, तदेव प्रतीकभावः : --(स्पृष्टशास्त्र)

(Prasiddha sadharmyam sadhyasadhanam upamanam, tadeva pratikabhavah)

A symbol should be nearest in appearance and function to the subject represented by it. Human beings are manifestations of life. They come closest to divinity in the realm of symbolism.

The functions and aspects of Lord Shiva are so numerous that it is virtually impossible to represent them in one form. That is why we come across images of various places. We shall take up a few symbols which are common to most Shiva images. These are a

damaru (a small drum with a wooden isthmus in the middle), the crescent moon, a trident, tiger skin, a snake, a bull etc.

All these symbols, which are chosen to represent various philosophical concepts and occult truths, are familiar objects in our daily life. Choosing these is in line with the principles of the science of symbolism.

These symbols have aroused equal interest in simple-hearted people of little formal learning and in men of great knowledge. On the one hand, we have a simple man like Puspadanta and on the other Adi Shankaracharya, a man of great learning. Both were great devotees of Shiva. We come across great philosophical expositions by Adi Shankaracharya which have kept scholars baffled for about 500 years. We find among his writings many hymns composed in praise of Lord Shiva. There are a number of other cases which show that Shiva has inspired all classes of devotees. Even social reformers have been inspired by him.

Lord Shiva is represented as the destroyer of evil. Artists have taken inspiration from his dancing pose. He has become the "Ishta-deva" (presiding deity) of dancers. Musicians have drawn inspiration from the sounds of his damaru. They have tried to foster unity in the diversity of various sounds coming from various instruments. He is depicted as a "bhikshu" (monk) in some images.

This is meant to suggest that he loves the creation and that he wants people to love him so that they do not get lost in the world of delusion. He, as a "bhikshu", asks for the love of his devotees. Humility is the underlying theme in devotion.

Let us now take up the symbolic representations of this popular deity. I am giving below the gist of the description given by Parvati of Him to a young mendicant when he appeared before her to test her devotion to the Lord.

The relevant verse says : He is the creator of the whole universe. This creation is stark, clean and unadorned. That is why He is shown without clothes. He is holding the trident symbolising the three gunas and is called 'Shuli'. The 'bhutas' (the five elements) are not bound by anything in the world. Shiva is the Lord of all elements. That is why he is called Bhutanath. This world is like a cremation ground where everything is dying every moment. He has

to live in this 'cremation ground' to take care of His devotees. The "Vrisha" (bull) represents "dharma". He is the carrier (vahana) of Lord Shiva. That is how Shiva is known as "Vrisha-vahana" (one whose carrier is a bull). Negative qualities like anger and desire are like poisonous snakes. The Lord has full control over them and is wearing them on his body as ornaments. The different activities in the world are symbolised as matted locks. Shiva keeps them over his head. Three of the Vedas are his three eyes.

Before we go into the detailed description of each aspect, it should be helpful to go through the following small chart :

<i>Symbols</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
Human form	: Climax of the creative spirit.
Fair complexion	: Satoguna.
Three eyes	: Power to inform the ignorant mind.
Unclad body	: Transcendental aspect of God.
Matted hair	: Accumulated Power.
Ashes	: Reminder of the relative insignificance of the material world.
Snakes	: Mysterious timeless ornaments of the cosmic body.
Four Arms	: All-round vigilance and sway, omnipotence.
Trident	: The three gunas.
Damaru	: Word (cosmic sound)
Tatva Mudra	: Knowledge.
Rosary	: Strict laws of creation of the merciful Lord.
Kamandalu	: Divine grace.
Half open eyes	: Introspection, self-inquest.
Crescent Moon	: Evolution of consciousness.
Dhatura flower (stramonium flower)	: Stages of creation.

The Ganges	: Purification.
Snake around the neck	: Time—Past, Present, Future.
Two Ear-rings (kundalas)	: Dualism.
Rudraksha necklace	: 108 elements used in the creation.
Tiger skin	: 'Inactive' power.
Yajnopavita (sacred thread)	: Discipline.
Elephant skin	: Firmness.
Bull	: Activity.
Flag	: A state beyond the pull of the material world.
Right foot dangling down	: Contact with reality.
Aura	: Serenity.
Cremation ground	: End of the illusory world
Now let us elucidate :	

Human form

Shiva has been shown in the human form. The reason for the choice of a human form has been explained earlier. In the science of symbolism the choice of the symbol has to be made keeping in view the dominant characteristics of the subject to be symbolised and the medium through which it is desired to be represented. Philosophers and scientists are one on this point that there could be no better way to represent the qualities of Shiva than in the human form.

Fair complexion

The fair complexion of Shiva symbolises eternal peace. This is the state of complete rest. It is called the '*turiya tatva*' state. It is in this state of absolute rest that the individual soul merges with the

Supreme. It is the state of peace when 'Prakriti' (Nature) stops over-activity and enjoys the 'turiya' state.

Three eyes (Trayambaka)

Shiva is known as "Trayambaka". The expression means the "Three-eyed Lord". In Hindu Mantra Yoga "The Trayambaka Mantra" is considered to be very "potent". It has been tried from time immemorial to acquire the power to ward off evil. In India, spiritual healers use this mantra for healing many physical ailments and resolving mental conflicts. Those who know to recite it correctly can see its effects in a short time, it is said.

The left eye represents the Moon, the right eye the Sun and the central eye fire. The two eyes on the left and right sides are "gross eyes" primarily meant to function in and for the outer world. The third eye is called the eye of knowledge. It is subjective and is directed towards the inner world. A chart is given below to clarify the point :

		<i>Left eye</i>	<i>Right eye</i>	<i>Central eye</i>
Objectively	:	The Moon	The Sun	Fire
Subjectively	:	Desire	Action	Knowledge

This placing seem to correlate with other systems also. The left side of the human personality is said to be dominated by the qualities of the heart. That is why the wife is made to sit on the left side of the husband. The right side is sun-dominated and more potent for activity. This is known through the science of physiognomy. This is the side of knowledge dominated by fire. Fire has the quality to burn negativities. Fire can purify the impure. This is the role of knowledge in life. Knowledge picks up the relevant from the irrelevant. It discriminates between right and wrong. This is also known as the eye of discrimination (viveka). There are many stories in Hindu mythology which speak, in allegorical terms, of the Lord opening His third eye and burning his opponents.

When Kamadeva attacked Shiva, Shiva opened his third eye and liquidated him.

The third eye is known as the eye of fire or the eye of discrimination. There is a lot of evidence available in Hindu scriptures to

support this meaning. A verse in Mundakopanished says that "Fire is the forehead of God. The Sun and the Moon are his two eyes. The four directions are his ears. The Vedas are his voice, the wind is his respiration (prana) and the earth is his feet. Such is the Lord who is the soul of all beings".

Carrying this forward in Yogic Sadhana, one goes beyond to "*Soma-mandala*". In Kundalini Yoga, there is the state of the *Sahasradal Chakra*—a circle with a thousand petals. It is beyond the Ajna chakra (the command region). Soma has three stages i. e. Apa (water), Vayu (air) and Soma proper. These three stages have been represented by the Ganges, matted hair and the Moon.

Here the Ganges represents the Apa stage, the hair represents Vayu and the Moon the Soma stage. There is another aspect of this third eye which merits a mention. In the scriptures, this eye is shown to have produced different effects. When it opened in compassion for Markandeya, it made him immortal. When it opened for Kamadeva in anger, it burnt him. When it opened for Anjana with sexual desire, she became pregnant without physical contact and gave birth to Hanumana.

Here is an interesting mythological story.

Vishnu used to worship Shiva with one thousand blue lotus-flowers everyday. One day he had one less. Vishnu did not make the worship irregular. He pulled out His own eye and completed the number. Shiva was very pleased with this gesture. In that moment of pleasure His third eye opened and gave Vishnu the famous weapon, "*Sudarshana Chakra*." All this goes to show that the third eye has an infinite capacity.

The two other eyes of Lord Shiva are Aruna—Varna (reddish). They symbolise the state of enjoyment arising out of complete understanding of the whole gamut of creation, preservation and destruction. These eyes are full of compassion for the devotees.

Digambara (Unclad body)

It seems rather baffling to think of the Lord in a naked form. Rishis had a purpose behind this. They wanted to show Shiva as a symbol of complete emancipation. He is free from the bondage of the material world. The four directions—east, west, north, and south

—are his clothes. Emulation of his ungarnished, free ways would lead to salvation. There should be no garnering and cumbering of the body or the mind if salvation is one's goal.

Matted locks

Shiva is the refuge of the whole creation. He is compared with the "Vata Vriksha" (Banyan tree). This tree gives lush, green shade and is a help to the tired traveller on a hot summer day. The three locks on the head of the Lord symbolise the three branches of the tree of knowledge—Vedanta, Sankhya and Yoga.

Ashes

Ashes all over the body of Shiva convey another important aspect of divine unity in diversity. All objects—howsoever different—when burnt, are reduced to ashes. Ashes here symbolise the oneness of all animate and inanimate objects in the manifest world. This symbol also indicates essence of Karma Yoga, the famous philosophy of the Geeta enunciating the principle of work without expectation of quick results or immediate material reward. To a yogi, work is worship. Rewards are insignificant like ashes. One can be covered by it but it does not mean much if one is a Yogi. The Geeta says "a yogi doing everything does not do anything." This semantic paradox highlights the concept of work without illusions of results.

Snakes

Those who have studied the nature and habits of snakes know that these reptiles do not make any "home" for themselves. They use the "homes" prepared by others for themselves. They can live on air for a long time. They live mostly far from habitation—in jungles and mountains. Their hearing equipment is in or near the eyes (चक्षुश्चरा). They are introvert creatures, so to say. Their unattached, quiet life endears them to yogis who treat them as symbols of restraint and renunciation. A snake hoards nothing, carries nothing, builds nothing and ordinarily 'hears' little of what is not essential for its vital existence.

There is another aspect. Many snakes are venomous. They are an example of the destructive force. Snakes have been associated with Shiva who is known as the Lord of Destruction.

The scriptures mention the “Naga (snake) formation” of planets. The Grahās (planets), which revolve round the Sun, follow a definite rule of movement. The track they follow once is seldom repeated soon. They shift a little and complete their next round. A gradually converging, circular formation is made by their movement around the Sun. It is after a definite period of time that they repeat the path of the first movement. This period varies from planet to planet.

The moon comes on the original circle of the Zodiac after a period of 19 years. Seventy-nine years is the period for Mercury and Mars when they come to the same longitude on the same date. Their conjunction in the same part of the Zodiac occurs after 79 years. The formation produced by the movements of the grahas resembles the formation of a curled up snake. There are eight grahas which keep on moving around the Sun as the centre. They are called snake-dominated planets. There are small galaxies—small snakes ! All these planets and galaxies exist on the cosmic body of God. That is why snakes have been shown decorating the body of the Lord.

Snake represent Kala (Time) in its continuity. It represents the force of destruction, reconstruction and development. In Indian literature, Kala is a dravya or tatva (element) like earth, water, fire, air and sky. Kala is the propelling force of the universe. It controls the cycle of life. “Kala is symbolised by snake”, says Bhuvaneshwari Samhita. It is the general principle of movement. Its complicated circle is like a snake resting in a coiled posture. It is an important factor but God is not bound by Time. He is ageless, timeless, uncreated and imperishable. Time or Kala offers itself as a decorative adjunct to Shiva. It can’t influence Him.

Kala, in the context of creation, is considered most aggressive and powerful but moves on the body of the Lord like a small, insignificant insect. It hangs on to **him** because of **his** mercy. It acts on **his** command.

The Four Arms

They represent the four directions. In some images, more arms have been shown which represent the sub-divisions of the main directions. They indicate omnipotence and omnipresence. God is

present everywhere. His arms are strong. They are ready to protect the devotee. They are the source of divine majesty and power. The arms, if closely watched, show that two of them are in the front and two originate from the back of the shoulders. The two frontal arms represent the manifest world whereas the two back arms represent the unmanifest world. The significance of an object is affected by the hand in which it is held. Let us examine them one by one.

The Trident

Being in the right back hand, the trident symbolises subjective knowledge. It has been given different meanings by different scholars. Some call it a symbol of power and punishment pertaining to the adhyatmika (spiritual), adhidaivika (divine) and adhibhautika (physical) spheres. A weapon for punishment in the hands of the “Lord of Mercy” looks rather incongruous. Therefore, it has been suggested that the trident in the hand of Shiva is a pointer. It points to the right path of Sadhana and directs people towards it.

There is another meaning given to this symbol. The edges of the trident are said to represent satva (inactivity), rajas (activity), tamas (non-activity), conveying that all the gunas are the handmaids of the Lord “trigunatita” (beyond the three qualities).

Shanti (peace), vairagya (detachment) and jnana (knowledge) are symbolised by the three sharp edges of the trident. These three, when placed in the hands of the Lord, act as remover of ignorance and lead the seeker to liberation.

According to Shakta, Shaiva and Buddhist scriptures, the trident is a symbol which stands for three kinds of power—the power of knowledge (jnana-shakti), of desire (ichchha-shakti), and of action (kriya-shakti).

The trident is the ‘void’ of the Buddhists. For the yogi, it is indicative of the state of purity (Niranjana). The trident also suggests the sthula (gross), sukshma (subtle) and karana (causal) state or the जाग्रत jagrata (waking), स्वप्न swapna (dream) and सुषुप्ती sushupti (deep sleep) conditions. Shiva, holding the Trinity of gunas and the key to success in Sadhana, is the Supreme Master. In his hands, the instrument is “tritapa haraka” (remover of all the three types of miseries)—physical, mental and spiritual. There is yet another way

of looking at it. Peace (shanti) resulting from the control of the tribulations of the mind, Vairagya (detachment) and jnana (knowledge) resulting from the dissolution of ego and understanding of unity in diversity can be achieved by the grace of the Lord. This is the final suggestion given in the last chapter of the Geeta by Krishna to Arjuna.

सर्वधर्मान् परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं व्रज ।

अहं त्वम् सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि ना शुचः ॥

Sarvadharaman-parityajya mamekam sharanam vraja ; Aham twam sarvapapebhyo mokshayishyami ma shuchah.” Geeta Chapter 18-66 “Surrender all action and duty unto me and I shall release thee from all sins ; grieve not !

Damaru.

The damaru being in the left back hand, symbolises the emotional aspect of life. It has subjective connotations. It represents one of the subtlest occult doctrines of Hindu philosophy. It stands for two utterly dissimilar states of existence—the real and the unreal ; the manifest and the unmanifest. These two states always remain apart. They can't be fused into one. At best, they can form a heterogeneous mixture. The damaru, when sounded, produces vibrations which are apparently dissimilar. But resonance fuses them.

The science of sound defines resonance as a state produced by the alternation of two states at a high speed. Alternation has to be dynamic. It produces a third kind of sound which is apparently homogeneous, but heterogeneous in reality. The damaru produces just this type of sound.

The damaru produces 'Nada' (cosmic sound). In the ultimate analysis, every object has in it a system of constituting forces. These forces are in constant movement. Momentum and stress produce sound. The time taken for sound-making motions is seen in terms of atomic time and the sound thus produced is super-sonic in order.

Every thought originates in sound. The moment a thought appears in the mind, an unheard sound is formed. This unheard

sound provides the basis for all forms. Each form is the tangible product of an energy pattern contained in sound.

According to a modern artist : "Form is always temporal, that is relative, for it is nothing more than the means of the movement, whereby today's revelations are made known and given resonance. Sound, then, is the soul of form which comes to life only through sound, from the inside out."¹

Ceaseless motion causes sound which is known as Nada or Omkara in the universe. The same sound vibrates in man's body, mind and in all particles. It is called Nada Brahma in action. Yogis, by various practices, can train their minds to hear this sound and once the quiet state is achieved, they can hear their own inner voice and the inner voice of others. They can communicate without the aid of speech. Sound can be heard at the Anahata Chakra. Scriptures say that it can be heard only by those who have purified the matter in their bodies and their minds. We reach such a state when each brain cell functions like a big factory and produces chemical changes, all in the twinkling of an eye but in low voltage conditions.

The damaru also represents the power of the Lord by which he maintains the universe. This represents the transformation of potential energy into kinetic energy required for running the machinery of a manifest system.

The Nada emanating from the damaru is said to have caused all the sounds in the universe—the sounds of the letters, the musical sounds and so on.

Tatva Mudra

Shiva does good to every body. All His activities are directed towards change for the better. Leaves fall in autumn for new leaves to come. It is not destruction for destruction's sake. It is aimed at a better creation. A well-known Sanskrita verse says :

*"Salutations to the Lord Shambu who is unlimited.
Salutations to the Lord Shankara who does good to everybody.
Salutations to the Lord Siva who is goodness personified."*

1. (Kandinski, P. 47

It tells us that Shiva means succour to the sufferer. He represents jnana (knowledge) whereas Brahma represents ichchha (desire) and Vishnu, kīrya (action). This tatva mudra, which is also known as jnana (knowledge) mudra, suggests that beneficial knowledge can be obtained through Shiva. This mudra conveys that all the activity of Shiva is aimed at kalayana (help, or succour) of the creation.

In some places we find this hand held in the Varada Mudra (a boon-bestowing pose). His are the hands that bless. In the jnana mudra, he blesses devotee with knowledge which will lead to eternal bliss.

In some illustrations, we see that in this hand of the Lord there is a small mirror. This is meant to symbolise the idea of atma darshana (self-realisation) through constant introspection. Its message is "look within yourself, and you will find the truth, the main source of eternal bliss."

This mudra of the frontal right hand is again suggestive of its importance. It is on the Jnana side or the sun-side of the body and it is in the front, meaning that it is the road from objectivity to subjectivity, from the manifest world to the unmanifest world. Knowledge is to be used for the right purpose. The use of knowledge involves deliberate effort on the part of the seeker. The scriptures have shown the process as : श्रवण. मनन, निदिध्यासन्

shravana	- manana	- nididhyasana
Hearing	- Thinking	- Acting

The Rosary

We find a rosary in the left front hand of Shiva. It is made of 50 Rudraksha beads. The word Rudraksha is composed of two parts : Rudra and Aksha. Rudra means that strict, strong and uncompromising principle which is the cause of all movement in the universe. Rudra is firm in the application of his rules. Aksha means eye. Rudraksha means that vigilant eye which is strict in the supervision of the laws of creation. The rosary may lead one to think of the process of japa or meditation. But it is not only that. The 50 beads represent the 50 letters of the Devanagari alphabet, symbolising the spoken and written language. It represents Shabda Brahman. In the hands of the Lord, it symbolises mastery over

WORD through which he applies the rule of His law. Shiva is the master of the world. Shabda (word) is Brahman. Shabda (word) is Shiva. Shiva is Shabda.

The rosary also symbolises constant vigilance of the Lord in every activity. The sumeru (head of the rosary) is of three beads representing all the three powers behind it—Guru (teacher), Mantra and Devata (deity), or perhaps, the three gunas.

Placing of the rosary in the left front hand is in keeping with the kind nature of Lord Shiva. He may be very strict in the application of His laws. He may be very vigilant but all this is for the good of the creation, which is dear to His heart.

Kamandalu

We see in some pictures that a kamandalu is lying on the left side of Shiva. Sometimes it is held in His left front hand. This variation is in the context of the idea which is sought to be represented.

Let us examine the significance of the kamandalu. It is made of a dried pumpkin and is full of nectar. Why has a container made of this vegetable shell been chosen to contain nectar which is so precious? We will have to go back to the method of making such kamandalus to answer this question. A dried pumpkin is plucked from a creeper. The fruit does not fall off by itself. It has to be cut off even when it has “died.” Then its shell has to be cleaned hollow. Now it becomes ready for containing anything. By the selection of this particular container rishis have conveyed a deep significance of spiritual life. The seeker has to make an effort to break away from the physical, mental and intellectual shackles. Then he has to cleanse his inner self. All desires and their tangible and intangible (inactive, dormant, dead?) impressions have to be transmuted. He has to surrender himself to the Lord who will fill him with grace (divine nectar.)

The nectar contained in the kamandalu suggests that the boon of knowledge obtained at the feet of the Lord is eternal bliss.

Half - Open Eyes

We are often reminded of the deep significance attached to

the half-open eyes.

One clue to this posture may be that the Lord is invariably shown in the meditative pose, drawn inward, and the half-closed eyes go with this state of mind. The eyes are neither fully closed, nor fully open. This suggests that Shiva's consciousness at one moment is focused within himself—while at the next it is centred round the manifest universe. It becomes "inner reality". It depicts the dual function when consciousness is directed inward. When He is unmanifest Brahman, the universe disappears. When He directs His attention outward, the universe comes into existence.

Thus the existence of the manifest universe is not a continuous phenomenon. It is intermittent just as a picture on a screen in cinematographic projection is. It is produced by alternating periods of light and darkness.

The damaru also corroborates this process of intermittent sounds.

Those who visit a Hindu temple at the time of worship with illumination and prayers (arati) see that a number of instruments like bells, conch shells and damaru are used to produce a variety of sounds. Not much concentration is required to hear the resonance of all these conflicting sounds. This resonance can be felt by pulling our minds upward and merging them into the distant unknown. This resonance is unitary sound. This sound represents the cosmic Nada. Critics have found enough material to assail this mode of remembering or worshipping God. They pose these questions : "Is God deaf ? Do you have to make so much noise to attract God's attention ? Don't you make a nuisance of yourself in a peaceful community."

Similar criticism is made of the Muslims when they offer "Azaan" in loud incantation. The peal of the church bell is also loud.

We know that in all religions some method of this kind is used to produce sounds which, though apparently diverse, represent one, unitary sound. All these sounds tend to draw our minds towards "Nada Brahmma".

The Crescent Moon

Of all the symbols available to us, the Moon has been found

to be the best to convey the idea of Time in respect of its duration and periodicity. The cycle of the Moon is indicative of the cycle of life—from birth to death and from death to birth, from summer to winter and from winter to summer, from day to night and from night to day. There are larger cycles—the cycles of manifestation. In all the cycles we find a waxing and waning phenomenon which is so prominent in the Moon. Take any aspect of life of any animate or inanimate object. The sequence is the same: birth, growth, zenith decline and death. It applies to human bodies, to seasons, to civilizations.

Nothing is beyond this process of cyclic changes and all these changes are accompanied by waxing and waning. That is how the Moon has been found to be the most appropriate symbol to represent this system by one little “ornament” on the head of the Lord.

It is just an ornament, not a part of the Lord's body. Rishis could have shown the Moon as an integral part of the Lord's countenance as they showed the third eye. But they did not do so. They were well aware that the time aspect was the essential feature of the reality which they saw in the Lord. To them Shiva is eternal reality. Time is an ornament which he puts on when He creates the world and takes off when He dissolves it. Unmanifest reality transcends time.

The Moon is also associated with peace. Its rays are soothing. This is shown in its ascendancy, conveying thereby that Shiva is the Lord of peace which is ever increasing, leading to ‘Mahananda’ (final bliss).

The Moon sheds light on dark nights. It is a source of light. It symbolises knowledge in the dark moments of ignorance. He, who brings understanding where there is misunderstanding, love where there is hatred, light where there is darkness, is dear to the Lord and the Lord brings him close to himself. Such a seeker is represented by ornaments put on by the Lord. The Moon is associated with the soft, pleasing aspect of the human personality—the qualities of the heart like mercy, kindness and love. The message of this symbol is : To be dear to the Lord you will have to develop your heart's natural gifts. To be one with the Lord you need inner

refinement.

In literature this quality is a manifestation of 'Rasa' (generally speaking, basic emotions).

The crescent moon is of 'dwitiya' (second day of the bright fortnight) size and is placed on the side of the Lord's head. It is ascending. Its placing on the left side represents lyrical loveliness of spirit.

Dhatura

A full-bloomed mauve dhatura (stramonium) flower is placed on the head of Shiva. This flower has five-cornered petals forming a cone, and there are five stems rising from the bottom of the cone. They represent creation, sustenance, destruction, cyclic arrangement and compassion).

They also symbolise two other groups :

रूप Rupa (loveliness), रस Rasa (pleasantness), गंध Gandha (fragrance) शब्द Shabda (sound), स्पर्श Sparsha (touch).

Mauve is a mixture of blue and red. Blue stands for fullness and red for activity which is directed towards fullness. By placing the dhatura flower on the head of the Lord it is suggested that all the five stages (from creation to compassion) and the five main elements and the five senses are under the control of the Lord. In the process of offering this flower to the Lord the devotee is reminded that at his activity at all levels has to be motivated by one object—achievement of fullness.

Ganga

The Ganga (Ganges) is shown falling on the head of the Lord and flowing from there in the world below. The story behind the descendency of the Ganga from heaven says that King Bhagiratha did much penance to bring down the river on earth from heaven for the welfare of his people. The word 'Bhagiratha' means one who has achieved victory over fate, in other words a man of great determination. The Ganga here represents self-effulgent knowledge. It symbolises purity. Its clean water represents the dominance of "Satva". It is present in the heart of everybody in the form of truth. In the yogic idiom

“Ida” is situated on the left side in the human system and symbolises the Ganga. It is Moon-dominated. ‘Pingala’ is on the right side symbolising the Yamuna. It is Sun-dominated. ‘Sushumna’ is in the centre symbolising Saraswati (knowledge). It is fire-dominated.

Vasuki Naga

Vasuki, the snake lies curled thrice around the neck of the Lord with its hood open. It is facing the right side of the deity. The three rounds represent the past, the present and the future. The open hood symbolises strictness. The rightward pose symbolises strictness. As has been said earlier, the snake represents Kala. (Time).

Kundala

There are two kundalas in the ears of the Lord. One is called ‘Alakshya’ which means ‘that which cannot be shown by any sign’. The second, ‘Niranjan’, which means ‘that which cannot be seen *by the eyes*.’ Both suggest that the Lord is beyond ordinary perception.

In some depictions, the kundala in the left ear is of the type used by women and that in the right of the kind used by the men. This variation in the form of kundalas symbolises ‘Shiva and Shakti’.

Rudraksha Rosary

As already stated ‘Rudraksha’ which means the “judicious eye”. The figure 108 (it has 108 beads) symbolises

- (i) The 108 elements used in the creation of the world, and
- (ii) The 108 and ‘Kalas’¹

These symbolise the complete hold of the Lord on the objective and subjective worlds.

1. “Kala” means the basic characteristic which introduces the existence of a “Guna”. The faculty of singing in a singer for example, is a quality but that aspect of his intelligence that makes him sing is the “Kala”. It cannot be cultivated. It is inherent. *The 108 kalas* = The 36 “tatvas”, functioning in three different “Gunās”. The 36 kalas multiplied by the three yield the 108 kalas.

Tiger Skin

The Lord is shown in some images sitting on tiger skin and in others wearing it. What does this signify ? Tiger symbolises power. Tiger-skin is indicative of potential energy. Lord Shiva is sitting over or wearing this symbol of potential energy conveying that **he** is the source of all energy which **he** activates at will.

Deeper significance is attached to this representation. When we think of the Lord as creator or destroyer, we have to presuppose **Him** as the source of tremendous energy or power which can create, sustain and destroy. Creation implies the prior existence of a conscious and powerful creator who, out of his consciousness, can create energy and everything else needed for the universe. There has to be consciousness to produce this energy.

Insentient energy cannot do self-production. This has been experienced by true occultists of all times. This is a subject of study and experience for all those who believe that there is something like consciousness behind the world of perception. This consciousness is the source of much energy so far unknown to science which has started probing into the mysteries of the mind and its powers. I am sure, one day we will be able to see beyond this curtain also as we have started seeing a little beyond the curtain of matter.

An ancient verse says : व्याघ्र चर्माम्बराधिष्ठम “Uyaghra-charmambra adhishtam”: The Lord is sitting on tiger-skin. There are some important characteristics attributed to tiger-skin.

- (i) It is warm.
- (ii) It keeps off insects.
- (iii) It is said to possess immense capacity for storing electro-magnetic energy.

Energy produced during meditation remains within one's own self if one sits on tiger-skin and meditates.

(iv) In the Aurvedic system of medicine tiger skin is said to be of help in curing diseases caused by phlegm. Phlegm is the cause of many diseases, including clouding of one's intellect. In other words, this helps in sharpening the intellect.

Yajyopavita

Lord Shiva is shown (in popular pictures) wearing on a sacred thread. It is indicative of activity and discipline. Its three threads symbolise (a u m) “Omkara”. By placing it on the body of the Lord, rishis have tried to convey the idea that Lord Shiva is the master of Prakriti (Nature). This idea has been elucidated in the chapter dealing with Ganesha in this book.

Elephant (Dvi-Pee) Skin :

“Dvi” means “twice” and ‘Pee’ “one who drinks”. “Dvi-Pee” means “elephant” because it first fills water in its trunk and then transfers it into its mouth—thus “drinking” twice. Shiva is shown covering his body with elephant-skin in some places. “द्विप-चर्म-परिधान भैरव शान्तम् शिवम्” Dvipi-Carma-Paridhanam Bhairavam Santam Shivam. Elephant-skin symbolises grandeur, firmness and alterness. It also represents for bearance.

Vrishabha

The bull (Vrisa) here is shown sitting by the side of the Lord. Its horns are of gold. Part of its tongue is outside its mouth and is bent towards its nose. Its name is Nandi. It is said to be the carrier of the Lord. It is a symbolic representation of the power of knowledge in action. It also symbolises Dharma. The Sanskrit word “Vrisa” means “dharma as well as bull”. “Vrisa also means righteousness, morality and justice.” It is this meaning that gives a clue to this important symbol associated with the Lord.

Lord Shiva is there where righteousness can be found. The wrath of Rudra punishes the moral law-breakers.

The bull also conveys the sense of strength. Here it represents spiritual strength. The symbol suggests that to be strong one must be clean in one’s conscience.

The Flag in The Trident

An orange-coloured flag with bull-images is attached to the trident of Shiva. The orange colour symbolises strength, power, patience and perseverance. The whiteness of the bull represents satoguna. (The bull represents dharma). The index finger of the

hand holding the trident points towards the flag proclaiming that for reaching the state beyond the three gunas, one has to follow the path of dharma with dedication, patience and perseverance.

The Rock

The Lord is often shown sitting on a rock. It symbolises uncompromising principles and laws of creation.

The Right Foot

The Lord is shown sitting on tiger-skin spread on a firm rock and His right foot is dangling down but not touching the ground. The right side represents knowledge and discrimination. The right foot represents conformity to His laws which are rational and not emotional.

The Aura

The Aura behind the Lord's head is blue. This represents vastness, peace and serenity. In the back ground there are peaks of snow-covered mountains (the Himalayas) which symbolise purity. The vastness of the background symbolises peace and liberation. Then there are different types of trees, like the Bilva tree, whose leaves in bunches of three symbolise the Trinity and are offered to the Lord by his worshippers. This means surrendering of the three gunas to the Lord. There is a *Shreephala*² tree which symbolises supermacy. Its fruit is an efficacious medicine. It is said to be a "balanced food".

There is a 'Vata (banyan) tree' under which the Lord is sitting. Its branches are touching the ground. The seed of this tree is small, but the tree itself is gigantic. It suggests that one small seed of desire can create a big world of multiple formations, each tying the individual shul to the gross world of objects.

Reptiles And Insects

Right in front of the Lord, reptiles and insects—like scorpions and snakes—are shown playing about. They are of opposite nature,

2 "*Shreephala*" (Fruit of a Bel tree) : Its shell is very hard. Its pulp is sweet like honey. It is considered good for stomach ailments. In India, this tree is considered as one of the "sacred trees".

playing around forgetting their enmity and losing their venom in the presence of the Benefactor of the World. This signifies that in the presence of the Lord, one loses his negative nature and becomes harmless.

Cremation Ground

The Lord is shown sitting in the cremation ground, which symbolises the correct attitude of a yogi to life. 'Shmashana' (cremation ground) is the end of the physical phase of life. This is a prerequisite for every new creation.

Some Important Names

All these names are indicative of some special divine purpose which the rishis wanted to convey.

Pashupati

"Pashu" means one who is "surrounded" (by inhabiting forces) and 'full of ego' ; "pati" means "master". Shiva takes his devotees out of the prison of ego. He brings salvation.

Neelakantha

This name is indicative of the Lord's compassion. He drank the poison which came out after the churning of the ocean. He saves his devotees by taking away their miseries.

Tripurari

"Tri" means three ; "pur" means a city or a castle. Man ordinarily lives in the city of ignorance and material attachments. "Tripur" also means स्थूल sthula (gross) सूक्ष्म suksama (subtle) and कारण karan (causal) bodies in a human personality. The Lord demolishes the walls round his ego-strengthened fortress of life. He brings about the state of Mukti. The Lord is known as Tripurari.

There are a number of stories in the Puranas which elucidate this grand name. The stories of the destruction of Gajasura and Andhakasura may be referred to by those who are interested in grasping the philosophical truth in a simple and lucid style.

Andhakasura is said to be the son of Hiranyaksha. "Andhaka," means morbid attachment which blinds even a truth-seeking man.

The destruction of Andhakasura means the destruction of ignorance. This story is allegorical, indicating the war between knowledge and ignorance. Andhakasura is shown in the story to be acquiring numerous forms every time he is attacked by Shiva. This happens in the beginning whenever knowledge attacks ignorance. Ignorance takes many forms.

The spirit of Vidya (knowledge), represented by Shiva, fights with Andhakasura (darkness or Avidya). The harder it is attacked by Vidya, the more it tends to increase.

The fact is represented by the "multiplication" of the figure of Andhakasura. Unless the evil qualities (Kama, Krodha etc.) are completely brought under the control of Vidya, and kept under control, life cannot attain the purity which is its rightful heritage.

There is an interesting Puranic story about **Shivaratri** a festival associated with Shiva. A hunter of Kashi set out for hunting one fine morning in a nearby forest. After a whole day's wandering in the woods, he felt very tired. Sitting under a tree, he fell asleep. When he woke up in the dark night, he heard fearful sounds of wild animals. He could not find his way. He decided to spend the night on top of a tree because he felt it was safe to do so in view of the presence of animals and reptiles around him. Sitting on a branch in the dark Shivaratri night, he began to pass time by plucking the leaves of the holy Bilwa tree. (Shiva is worshipped with these leaves). There was Shiva Linga below on which the leaves fell. It was an unintentional offering. But it pleased the Lord of Mercy and Kindness all the same. The man was blessed by the Lord. His precarious perch on a tree in the dark night, made more miserable by hunger, ended in receiving divine blessings.

Behind this story, there is a deep meaning, Kashi is a famous city with a renowned temple of Lord Vishwanatha (Shiva). The Ganga sanctifies the city. From such a place a hunter goes for hunting, meaning thereby that a man born of intrinsic purity goes out for sensual pleasures into the world of temptations. Tired of chasing the ephemeral pleasures of life, he starts thinking. He withdraws all his outgoing energies within himself and does not react to outside stimuli. He wakes up in a different world "within" where he is confronted with dreadful "animals"—violence and

greed. To save himself he resorts to his discriminating power. He climbs the tree of wisdom.

He is extraordinarily alert. He keeps himself awake to prevent a fall from the tree. Even his involuntary actions are pure. The Lord is pleased. He is an awakened man. He is able to nullify the negativities in him. His night of lust, ignorance, fear and temptations has ended ! He is blessed.

In India, festivals have been generally planned to create a spiritual climate, an atmosphere in which people can find sources of spiritual health to enrich their lives.

Festivals, it has been said, serve the same purpose in time as temples do in space.³

3. Details and philosophical meanings behind other festivals are mentioned at some length in my book on the spirit of India festivals.

PART III

THE FEMALE TRINITY

Chapter VII SARASWATI—The Goddess of Knowledge.

Chapter VIII LAKSHMI—The Goddess of Ultimate Goal.

Chapter IX DURGA—The Eliminator of Misery.



SARASWATI

7

SARASWATI

Saraswati is a post-Vedic Goddess of knowledge. She is considered to be the source of all learning. There are scriptural references relating her to Brahma, the Creator of the universe.

The word “Saraswati” originates from the Sanskrit root “सृगतौ” (srigatou).

सरो विविधं ज्ञानं विद्यते यस्या चित्तो सा सरस्वती ।

(Saro vividham jnanam vidyate yasyam chitua sa Saraswati)

Saraswati is the ocean of understanding or consciousness in which vibrate different types of knowledge.

The root-word सृ (sri) means vibration and movement. Wherever there is any obstruction, movement stops. So absence of obstruction is essential for movement. Wherever there is resistance, there is ignorance and darkness. Science confirms this principle : “Ether at rest is darkness, ether in motion is light.”

That divine principle, which is the cause of all movements, source of spiritual light, remover of all ignorance and promoter of all knowledge, is Saraswati.

All discoveries, all inventions, all that is created is a manifestation of Saraswati’s grace. Her powers make electrons move in a cyclic system. It is she who helps atoms become molecules. This is the modern Hindu way of looking at this divine representation.

A popular prayer says :

या कुन्देन्दु तुषारहार धवला या शुभ्रवस्त्रावृता ।
 या वीणा वरदण्ड मण्डित करा या श्वेतपद्मासना ॥
 या ब्रह्माच्युत शङ्कर प्रभृतिभिः देवैः सदा वन्दिता ।
 सा मां पातु सरस्वती भगवती निःशेष जाड्यापहा ॥

*“Ya kundendu-tusara-hara-dhavala ya subhravastravrta
 Ya vina varaddanda manbit kara ya sveta padamasna.
 Ya Brahmachyuta-sankara-prabhrtibhih devaih sada vandita
 Sa mam patu Saraswati Bhagavati nihesesa jadyapaha.*

May Goddess Saraswati protect me (from all the worldly evils and from the trio of sorrows—आधिभौतिक adibhoutik आधिदैविक adhidaivik and आध्यात्मिक adhyatmic)—by entirely eliminating the dullness of intellect (and kindling the light of knowledge). She is as white and bright as the flower jasmine, the moon, dew and a garland of pearls. She is clad in white clothe. Her hand is adorned by the finest vina (a musical instrument). She is sitting on white lotuses and is adored by divine beings like Brahma, Vishnu and Siva.

With this prayer most Hindus start new intellectual ventures. As I have said earlier, the worship of Saraswati is practised for acquiring more and more knowledge with the object indicated in the meaning of “Saraswati”. One who bestows sweetness to our self is “Saraswati”. All knowledge should lead us to the knowledge of self; only then it is real knowledge. Through this, we can understand our true nature.

[THE SARASWATI SYMBOLS]

Each symbolic reference attributed to Saraswati represents some philosophical idea.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1. Female form | } | The power of the Creator. |
| 2. Consort of Brahma : | | |
| 3. Fair complexion and white garments : | } | Purity. |
| 4. Four arms and four hands : | | |
| | | Omnipotence and mind, (man) intellect (buddhi), conscience, (chitta), ego (ahankara) |

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 5. Veena | The music of life. |
| 6. Book : | All knowledge. |
| 7. Rosary : | Concentration. |
| 8. Hamsa (swan) as carrier : | Purity and discrimination. |
| 9. Peacock : | Worldly knowledge. |
| 10. White Lotus seat : | Purity and detachment. |
| 11. Red aura : | Activity. |
| 12. Banana leaves : | Composure. |
| 13. Right leg on the left leg : | Worldly knowledge dominated by supreme knowledge. |
| 14. Lotus in water : | Equanimity in prosperity. |
| 15. Small floating lotuses : | Powers "on the way" |
- Let us take them one by one :

The Female Form

Women held a place of great respect and recognition in the Vedic tradition in India. That is why we find that anything which is said to be of a high order is reverentially described as a feminine object like Mother Shruti (the Vedas) Mother Bhagvat Geeta, Mother Durga, Mother Ganga (the Ganges), etc. Rishis believed that woman was far more powerful than man. She was more tolerant. She had much more moral and spiritual strength. She could withstand more roughness of life. She could bear pain more patiently than man could.

The Consort of The Creator

Saraswati is the "Shakti" (power) of the Creator. The reason is that the Creator must possess full knowledge before He begins to create. Knowledge is required at every stage of creation to maintain harmony and rhythm in the process.

Fair Complexion And White Garments

Saraswati is absolutely fair and clad in spotless white garments. This signifies absolute purity. She is "Shuddha Satva" (ultimate

purity). She is the first original emanation from Para Brahma (the Supreme Lord). In order to create anything we have to have the combination of pure elements. This suggests—subjectively—that to achieve a particular object, we have to make a single-minded effort. Any diversion or any extraneous attraction will upset the results. That is what is sought to be represented by this symbol. It signifies “Satvik Vidya” (true knowledge of the purest spiritual kind).

Four Arms And Four Hands

As in the case of many gods and goddesses, the four arms represent the four directions, meaning thereby the all-pervasiveness of the divine principle—both subjective and objective. Saraswati is all-pervading and all-powerful.

The two frontal arms relate to the manifested world of objects and the two back arms represent the world behind the world of objects—the subjective world. Many scholars have said that the four arms or the four hands represent the four aspects of the inner human personality—mana (mind), buddhi (intellect), chitta (conditioned consciousness) and ahankara (ego).

Veena

Grossly speaking, veena symbolises the music of life. The collective sound of all our thoughts and actions in the cosmic forms operates as music in the universe. In Sanskrit literature, veena, in the hands of Saraswati, is called (कच्छपी) ‘Kachchhapi’ meaning a female tortoise. This representation carries behind it the key to success in the acquisition of knowledge.

The seeker of knowledge must “withdraw” occasionally like the tortoise his whole attention from the world outside before he can venture to acquire knowledge. He has to withdraw his senses from the world of objects.

The second characteristic sought to be conveyed through this symbol is that the seeker has to keep his mind constantly on his goal wherever he is, as the female tortoise does. The female tortoise lays eggs, covers them with sand and keeps moving about keeping her mind all the time on her eggs.

Saraswati is seen holding the veena in her two frontal hands. The right hand is placed on the lower side and the left on the upper side of the veena. The veena is kept slanted downward on the right side. The placing of the left and the right hands signifies the operative range between the lowest and the highest. The upper hand (left) is directed towards the highest (“urdhva-gami”), and the lower hand (right) is directed towards the lowest (“adhogami”). The Veena represents urdhvagami vidya (higher, supramental knowledge) as well as adhogami avidya (downward, non-knowing trend).

Placing of the Left Front Hand on the upper side of the symbol of knowledge show that knowledge has to be operated with conscious (frontal) application of the heart (left side). It should be dominated by the heart’s qualities. In other words, knowledge should be used for the good of others.

Placing of the Right Front Hand on the lower side of the veena—the side of avidya (lack of knowledge)—symbolises that avidya has to be kept under the control of intellect consciously. Even if one has “negative knowledge” in him, one should always keep it under the control of one’s intellect and be careful in its application or, in other words, one should always use discrimination before putting into use one’s worldly knowledge.

The veena in the hands of Saraswati is मुक्त छंदी “Mukta Chhandi”. It means multi-directional rhythmical potential. Knowledge has the potential to be used for both positive and negative purposes. It is left to the user to decide which one he prefers. The range is open to him.

The Book

Ordinarily a book is a means of acquiring knowledge. But in the Hand of Saraswati it symbolises total knowledge. Saraswati is the goddess of all knowledge—worldly as well as spiritual.

The placement of the book in the left (rear) hand is a significant caution. Knowledge has to be held under the surveillance of the heart, which means that its application and acquisition should be controlled by the soft side of the human personality. This, a subjective process, has been represented by placing the book in the (rear) left hand.

The Rosary

Grossly speaking, a rosary symbolises concentration. It is held in the right (rear) hand. It is made of transparent stones. It is called स्फटिक माला “sphatika mala”. Here “sphatika” (transparent) symbolises knowledge through which one can see the reality (para-darshini vidya). There are 50 beads in this rosary which symbolise 50 letters (from Aa to Ksha) of the Devanagari alphabet. These letters or varnas stand for the written word. The Sanskrit language is written in the Devanagari Script. Sanskrit is the mother of many languages. It is one of the oldest languages of the world. Its script—Devanagari—is said to be script in which divine (‘or the Devas’) wisdom has been written.

Saraswati symbolises the codified, cumulative wisdom of mankind irrespective of religious or semantic variations. The rosary is held in “Japa Mudra” (meditative pose). In this mudra, the two middle fingers are placed with the thumb, forming a point. This mudra or pose represents the Guru-Mantra-Devta trio.

The thumb stands for the Guru (teacher), the finger next to the smaller finger—the third finger—stands for Mantra and the finger next to the index finger stands for Devata (the presiding deity of the Mantra).

This trio is also known as the trio of the knower, the knowledge and the known. This mudra represents the united trinity and it has a great meaning in tantric literature. Tantric scholars have dealt in detail with the significance of each finger which is used in various japas explaining when the first, the second and the third fingers are used.

Spiritually speaking, this rosary is the same as the Vijayanti (name of a flower) garland of Vishnu, Mundamala (garland of skulls) of Kali and Mahakali, or Padma Nala (lotus stem) of the Buddha.²

Hamsa (Swan)

Saraswati is shown sitting on a hamsa. The swan is known amongst the birds to have a tremendous amount of discriminating

² Vijayantimala and Mundamala have been discussed in the chapter on Vishnu and Mahakali. For Padma Nala, see the glossary.)

power. It has a very sensitive beak through which it can discriminate between the right and the wrong. It can discriminate between the real and the unreal. It can separate the milk from water. Place shining stones, both really precious and fake, close to a hamsa. It will discriminate between the real and the fake. (This notion is traditional and legendary.)

The second characteristic of the hamsa is that it stays in water but does not get so wet as to be incapacitated. This is indicative of the fact which is tried to be conveyed by the saying "Live in the world but do not be possessed by the world" This acute sense of discrimination represented through a hamsa is used by Goddess Saraswati as her "carrier". She symbolises illuminating knowledge (vidya). It is represented through a swan and is directed to the supreme, and not to worldly or superficial knowledge.

In ordinary sense, a white swan represents purity and the capacity to discriminate between right and wrong, and the will to accept the right.

Spiritually speaking, swan symbolises "Jiva" (the conditioned soul). Jiva functions through the "pranashakti" (power of life) which manifests itself in the inhaling and the exhaling processes as 'hamsa' and it is through this medium that "chidrupini (symbolic of pure consciousness) Saraswati चिद्रूपिणी सरस्वती functions. This hamsa keeps on floating in the causal nothingness in Nirvikalpa (single-minded) samadhi (undistracted meditation). This is the Kundalini shakti of the Shaktas (a sect), in the Sahasra Chakra, and the Nirvanic bliss (freedom from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth) of the Buddhists.

The Peacock

Artists and thinkers have tried to convey ordinary worldly knowledge through a mayura (peacock) sitting close to Saraswati on her right. It is anxiously looking to her for a chance to be used as her carrier.

The peacock represents, 'Avidya' (knowledge directed towards mundane comprehension). It is said to have some unedifying habits, though it is beautiful. Its food includes poisonous insects and re-

ptiles harmful to man. It does not have stable habits. Its moods keep on changing. It is overly influenced by weather conditions. When in the agony of separation, it weeps for long.

There is a story in the scriptures about the colourful spotted feathers of the peacock. Indra, the king of Devas, was once tormented by sexual desire.

The wife of Gautama (the famous saint) named Ahilya was known for her beauty. When he could not get a chance to meet her alone, he took the form of a cock and crowed earlier than the time when the sage used to go to bathe in the Ganges. When Gautama left his house, Indra found Ahilya alone. He raped her. The rishi came to know of it and cursed Indra. Indra became a leper. It is said that there erupted spots resembling the vagina on his body. Indra did much penance to get over the evil effects of his deed and he was forgiven. He was given the beautiful form of a peacock. Those ugly spots became colourful.

Whenever a peacock looks at its feet, while dancing in ecstasy, it feels sad—a reminder of Indra's original sin? Its feet are disproportionate to its body and that causes disappointment. There lies the reason of its sorrow-tinged dance. When soft clouds hover over the sky, the peacock dances not with gay abandon but with restrained pathos. Its joy is so short lived.

This suggests that when knowledge is being carried by the peacock (avidya), it is bound to express itself in unedifying forms. It will be dominated by worldly desires as Indra once was. This symbol also shows the end of this type of knowledge. It may add many worldly achievements (colourful feathers) to the individual's cap but there will always remain a lurking inhibition in him. His pleasure will continue to be marred by a feeling of repentance and unfulfilment.

The position of the peacock in pictures or idols is also significant. Whenever one proceeds to acquire knowledge, worldly knowledge tends to stand by him on the sun-dominated right side. The right side indicates activity. So in the active acquisition or application of knowledge, there remain chances of ignorant activity taking charge of the human personality. That is how we find many good

people getting into the trap of name and fame. Subtle ego takes them into its trap and once they start riding the colourful “peacock” the result is bound to be unedifying like the peacock’s ways.

It is also significant that the peacock is placed on the right side anxiously waiting to be used by Saraswati as her carrier, whereas the hamsa is on the left side, completely relaxed. This represents the desired balance between head and heart. Men of knowledge must possess this quality. Only then they can help maintain the rhythm and harmony of existence.

When men of knowledge start dwelling in the realm of higher wisdom, dominated by the heart’s qualities, there comes into being around us a world of ethics and art, but there is little by way of scientific discoveries. Society, in general, starts stagnating.

If knowledge is dominated by worldly considerations, and intellect overrides the heart, the result is catastrophes like wars. Knowledge in our times is “riding the peacock.” Science is advancing with tremendous speed, but hearts of people have become dry. Family structures are breaking. Man is becoming an automation. There is frustration all over, and there is a great possibility of scientific knowledge being used for destruction.

White Lotus Seat

Lotus ordinarily symbolises creation and detachment. Saraswati is shown sitting on a white lotus. It is not totally white, but mainly white. It has a reddish tinge. Its base is white. This represents “Ritambhara Prajna (रितम्भरा प्रज्ञा) wisdom that nourishes truth (supreme knowledge). The red tinge represents activity. This lotus as a whole means supreme knowledge in activity. The Divine Mother is shown seated on this. She presides over this, indicating that for acquisition of supreme knowledge, one has to perform activities founded on divine wisdom—wisdom which helps the evolution of consciousness, and which operates in the world also in the context of its relationship with other beings through spirit in contrast to distinction our relationship based on physical consciousness.

The Aura

The aura or the light shown behind Saraswati’s head is red.

This symbolises Rajoguna (activity). As we know, Saraswati is said to be the consort of Brahma, the Creator. She has to be active. She represents the “Rajoguna vritti” (“the activity-principle”). Saraswati is the Shakti of the Creator. She has to be Rajoguna Shakti (power) to be able to help Him in creation. You have noticed when we discussed Brahma, the Creator, that His face is drawn in golden red. This redness signifies the active principle which is necessary for creation.

Banana Leaves

These leaves symbolise coolness, composure and over-fresh natural piety and beauty. On a higher plane, they represent the combination of “tatva jnana” (real knowledge) and bhakti (devotion). It is known about the banana plant that it seldom bears fruits a second time. In the case of Saraswati, the banana leaves signify that once supreme knowledge has been attained, the final stage has been reached. It is life-long enlightenment.

It may be interesting to note that the trunk of the banana plant is made of multiple layers. If you start removing the layers one by one, you reach where you find nothing further to remove. This suggests that “tatva janana” (real knowledge) leads us to state of finality described in the Upanishads as “neti-neti”.

The shining banana leaves are on one side green and on the other whitish, suggesting that being ever-new and fair, real knowledge is based on “satva” (purity and truth). A detailed description of this is given in “Sharada Tilaka-Granth”.

The Right Leg Placed (on the left)

This may look like a pose of convenience but it is not so. Saraswati is sitting crossing her left leg with the right. The right foot is serenely resting on a lotus. The left leg represents mayura avidya (the peacock’s gross intelligence) while the right leg represents hamsa vidya (the swan’s pure intelligence). Both of these have been discussed earlier. The idea sought to be conveyed through this symbol is that even worldly knowledge, howsoever negative it may be, is dominated by one’s urge to know the reality, to find real peace. It will ultimately lead to supreme knowledge. The seeker of true know-

ledge worships Saraswati concentrating on the right foot which is resting on the lotus and one who looks for worldly knowledge concentrates on the left foot resting on the green leaves symbolising worldly prosperity. This is the crux of the formal representation of the Goddess of knowledge and the various aspects which direct the seeker to the path of attainment of supreme enlightenment.

Lotus in Water

Sometimes we find Saraswati sitting on a lotus and a hamsa together. The hamsa and the lotus are floating in calm and clear water. Water here symbolises the Ocean of Life indicating that one has to attain supreme knowledge living in the world and not running away from it.

As we know, lotus is the symbol of evolution and detachment, evolution because it makes its way through water and rises above its surface with glory ; detachment because it remains in water but is not incapacitated by it. These are two important characteristics on which knowledge must rest. It must also possess the power of discrimination and the hamsa's capacity for purity.

It is the path of the outer being to the inner being, from objectivity to subjectivity, from worldly ways to divine.

Small Floating Lotuses

In the water surrounding the main lotus, we find small lotuses floating. They are of different sizes, forms and shades. They symbolise the various experiences or powers one is likely to achieve in the course of one's spiritual journey. The representation in the form of floating lotuses is again a reminder to the seeker of knowledge that he is not to stop after gaining intermediary powers. He is not to remain attached to them. He should keep his eyes on the final goal which is the end of the great journey beyond self.

All the **ornaments** that are shown on Saraswati are of bright white colour symbolising purity and peace.

She has been known by different names in the scriptures as Padma, Kamala etc. She has been given these names according to the functions she has to perform in various situations. In the

limited sense, she is the power of the Creator. In a broad sense, she is jnana, ichchha and kriya (knowledge, desire and action).

The Goddess of knowledge has fair and gentle appearance. From the spiritual standpoint she is divine light, "jnanam Brahman" (knowledge is Divine Power). She is the presiding deity of all academic ventures of the Hindus.



LAKSHMI

8

LAKSHMI

Goddess Lakshmi represents “the final goal” in life. The word Lakshmi originates from “Laksya” or “Laksma” which means “goal”. Lakshmi, by semantic implications is the goddess of the supreme “goal”. Another Sanskrit word “Laksha” means a lac (lakh) or a hundred thousand (rupees etc.). This word has led to the superficial belief that Lakshmi is the goddess of the rich alone.

She is said to be Lord Vishnu’s consort. The word “Vishnu” is related to the word Vishva, (the created world) and means one who is present in every atom of the creation. His consort has to have powers and majesty conducive to life and its maintenance. Lakshmi is the active principle which helps Vishnu sustain the creation.

Another name for Lakshmi is “Shri” (श्री) which means grace and competence, confidence, Kanti and ‘Yogyata’. It means the power of wealth, knowledge, purity and physical powers. The highest state of “Shri” is always present in the Brahman (cosmic principle). He is known as Shripati, the Lord of Shri. Blessings of the cosmic principle appear in a person in the form of divine lustre with powers mentioned above. The Vishnu Purana says :

यत सत्त्वम् ततः लक्ष्मी

“YATAH SATVAM TATAH LAKSHMI

लक्ष दर्शनाद्भूतबोः — पाणिनि व्याकरण (Panini) लक्ष Laksya — the goal
“दर्शन” Darshana — seeing through. “मंकन” Ankana — to mark.

Where there is Satva (inner strengthened purity) there is Lakshmi.

Worldly people seek worldly prosperity. They worship her as the goddess of worldly wealth, money, power and position etc. Seekers of truth worship her as the goddess of the supreme goal. From our deep study of this beautiful symbolical representation, it is clearly borne out that she is capable of granting both worldly and non-worldly gains.

The following are some Lakshmi symbols :

SYMBOLS	WHAT THEY REPRESENT
1. The female form.	Attunement with human beings. The power of Vishnu.
2. The four arms.	Omnipotence.
3. The four hands.	Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha.
4. The half-open, hundred petal lotus (upper left hand)	Dharma in action.
5. Gold coins. (Lower left hand)	Material prosperity.
6. "Abhaya Mudra" (Right lower hand).	The pose of assurance of safety. Freedom from fear.
7. The fully open, thousand-petal lotus (upper right hand).	Total evolution.
8. The pinkish countenance	Compassion and love.
9. The red dress.	Creative activity.
10. The lotus seat.	Detachment.
11. Lotus in Kshira Sagara (Sea of Milk)	Peace and plenty.
12. An owl sitting on the left side.	Material world's darkness.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 13. Four fair elephants. | All-pervading purity and wisdom. |
| 14. Continuous pouring of water. | Constant sustenance. |
| 15. Golden vessels. | Charity. |
| 16. Small lotuses and honey bees. | Dignified attachment. |

Let us now take the main symbols and discuss them :

The Female Form

Lakshmi, the divine power, is represented in a female form symbolising affinity and attunement with human beings. It is said that gods descend to the state of human beings and that human beings ascend to the state of gods. This is to convey the idea that the state of consciousness represented by a particular god is within the reach of all human beings.

She as the consort of Lord Vishnu acts as the power of the divine principle and helps him maintain the creation.

The Four Arms

As another symbols, four arms represent omnipotence and omnipresence.

The Four Hands

Generally four hands represent the total activity represented by a particular God. The meaning may vary a little with variations in the context. The two frontal arms through two frontal hands symbolise the activity in the objective world and two back arms through two back hands symbolise the activity at the subjective level. In this case upper left back hand represents dharma, (duty). The lower left frontal hand represents Artha (material wealth). The right lower frontal hand represents Kama (desire) and the upper back right hand represents Moksha (salvation).

Half open Lotus

In the upper left hand she holds a half-blossomed lotus which

has a hundred petals. This hundred-petal lotus is closely connected with the tantric Anahata chakra (see glossary). In philosophical terms, the number 100 represents the state of Sadhana. This lotus represents dharma also. Dharma means one's duty or the task to which one is born in the particular time or place. In other words this means "one's allotted task". Kanada, the author of 'Vaisesika' philosophy says :—

यतोभ्युदय-नि श्रेयस-सिद्धिः स धर्मः

“YATAH ABHYUDAYA-NIHSHREYASA-SIDDHIH SA DHARMAH”

i. e. Dharma is that through which worldly progress and final emancipation are achieved. Professor Mackenzie, in his “Manual of Ethics” speaks of the normal law thus : “Thou shalt labour within thy particular province, with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind.” Carlyle expressing his views on Dharma says : “Know what thou canst work at, and work at it like a Hercules.” The ‘Geeta’ has further clarified the concept of moral work. It is said that while doing one's duty one should be completely detached and selfless. Selflessness is the essence of right morality.

The evolution of individual consciousness takes place because of true Dharma briefly explained above. Then it evolves into cosmic consciousness. This lotus is basically red.

It is not in full blossom. It has streaks of whiteness. The red in it represents Rajoguna, the functional aspect, and the white represents Satoguna the purity aspect. Activity and purity are two basic traits of dharma. In other words this symbolises progress in both mundane and spiritual side by side.

Varada Mudra

Next comes Artha (material wealth, money). “The hand of artha (wealth), in its symbolic representation, shows gold coins falling on the ground, where we find an owl sitting. This hand is held in Varada Mudra (boon-granting pose). The falling of coins represents prosperity in all direction, or total prosperity. The gold coins do not represent money ; they also symbolise prosperity at all levels.

On the physical level, good health on the mental level, integra-

tion and peaceful mind ; on the intellectual level, pure and perfect knowledge and on the spiritual level, total liberation or fusion in the cosmic self.

Abhaya Mudra

Now in this cyclic movement of evolution we come across the right lower hand which is held in Abhaya Mudra (the pose signifying assurance of freedom from fear). From the mythological point of view Kama means both worldly and non-worldly desires. Fear is caused by unfulfilled desires. Kama is desire for evolution, and not mere sex, as is commonly presumed. It comes from four-fold ambits : Dharma, Aratha, Kama and Moksha and Samata (equality), Samavedana (sympathy), sahasstitva (co-existence) and sahakarita (cooperation).

Many thinkers have related Artha to “Kanchana” (gold), meaning prosperity of the physical world. Kama is related to kamini (the passion-dominated world). But the beauty part of life as such does not stand for physical beauty alone. It stands for sublime beauty of higher motives and acts also.

Lotus in The Right Upper Hand

Moving from here we come to the right upper hand. This hand is holding a lotus which is fully opened ; a lotus with one thousand petals which is synonymous with sahasra-ra-chakra (the highest point in the evolution of the Kundalini Shakti of the Tantriks. This lotus has a red base, with a blue tinge. The red in it represents “Rajas” and the blue represents ‘Akasha’ (space). They signify total evolution.

‘Purna Vikasa’ or total evolution is signified by the word “Prema” (both *Eros* and *Agape*). “Prema” cannot be understood here in the ordinary sense of the love between man and woman. This is the love of the highest order. This love holds the atoms and the molecules in an atomic structure. This love makes a tree out of small seed. This love is the binding force which keeps the whole universe together.

Here it is significant to know that there are two frontal arms and two arms rising from the back of the two frontal arms. The frontal

arms represent “*priya marga*” the manifest, pleasant ways of the world. *Priya marga* represents *Artha* and *Kama*. The other two back arms signify *Dharma* and *Moksha* (the “*Shreya marga*” or the path of *glory*). This cycle is subtle and is conveyed to the seeker through *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*.

Pinkish Countenance

The general countenance of Lakshmi is said to be “*aruna varna*”. *Aruna* is the pinkish shade which we find on the horizon before sunrise. This colour represents compassion and love, This is the colour of the climax of love in life, the peak of *dharma*. This is indicative of the highest achievement on the path of prayer.

The Red Garments

Lakshmi is shown wearing a red dress. It is again the colour of *Rajas*, which means creative activity. The golden embroidery indicates plenty. This re-affirms the idea of prosperity in general. This is in keeping with her being the consort of *Vishnu*.

Lotus in Kshira Sagara

The goddess is shown sitting on the lotus which is floating in the ocean of Milk. This indicates living in peace and plenty. This posture means “Live in the world, but do not be possessed by the world”. The lotus keeps smiling on surface of water. Its origin is in mud, deep under water but its flowering is above the water-surface. Detachment and evolution is the message of this poetic symbol.

The Owl

The owl sitting on the left side of Lakshmi where gold coins are falling, represents darkness. It represents perversion of attitudes in material prosperity. An owl, generally speaking, is a night bird. It is very clever. It can't see clearly in the day time. One who dwells in darkness, dwells in ignorance. Undue attachment to wealth shows ignorance and disturbs the economic balance in society. If man does not keep his balance when he gets a lot of material resources, he is bound to become a nuisance to himself and to others around him.

Four Fair Elephants

In common pictures of Lakshmi, we see four whitish elephants pouring water drawn from the ocean on the goddess. This water is contained in golden vessels. Those four elephants represent the four directions—North, South, East, West. The white *hue* here means purity. Wisdom has been occasionally represented in Hindu mythology by the form of an elephant. I have dealt with this while discussing Ganesha.

Elephants Pouring Water (From Golden Vessels)

The symbol of four elephants pouring water from golden vessels on the goddess suggests that the chain of Purusartha (endeavour), dharma, artha, kama and moksha has to be continuously strengthened with wisdom, purity and charity. Thus we see that Lakshmi represents activity for achievement of liberation and attainment of self-realization.

The liberation indicated here may not be automatic or total. This is a higher state of self-endeavour. Here is an example. If somebody goes upto the roof of a building which is a seven storeyed one and sees the sky without any obstruction to his vision, he finds himself in freedom from the suffocating walls. There is no conditioning of his being. He is at the threshold of a state akin to moksha. This freedom gives one the idea of total liberation—the ultimate goal of human life.

Lotuses, Big And Small

Finally, we see in this “Ocean of Life” a great sight. Lakshmi is sitting on a big lotus which is surrounded by many small lotuses of different colours. There are honey bees on the lotuses.

If we take the symbol of the lotuses as meaning detachment, the bees can be taken symbols of dignified attachment. True seekers are attracted by the pollen of grace to the deity. They return home with the bounty of fulfilment with spiritual honey that makes their life of travail in this world sweet. They reach their “Lakshya”, their goal, through Lakshmi. This, in essence, is the message of the symbolism employed by artists and poets in depicting Lakshmi.

Rishis of the Vedic times have worshipped her various aspects

giving different names ; She is called bhoota dhatri 'भूतधात्री'* (bestower of prosperity on all things Prema murti प्रेममूर्ति (embodiment of love) and remover of distress, pain and poverty.

Rishis say .

Knowledge, prosperity capacity to perform every beneficial and good act with perfection, comfort, wealth and victory are the main characteristics of the grace of Lakshmi. Rishis in this context have also said that there are three main activities Dana (giving), Bhoga (Enjoyment), Sanchaya (accumulation). In giving one should act as young i. e. he should be carefree while giving. He should give with a free hand. While enjoying, he should be like a happy child and while accumulating he should be calculating and careful like experienced and old people. This symbol is a beautiful synthesis of worldly and spiritual meanings. Spiritualism does not mean renouncing of the world or worldly prosperity. It is the discriminating utilisation of prosperity that leads to liberation, and bliss.

Lakshmi is worshipped in India on the Dewali (festival of lights). On this day residence and bussiness houses are cleaned, white washed and painted. Goddess Lakshmi is invoked and worshipped. There is a deep message in this festival. For both worldly and spiritual prosperity one has to cleanse oneself of all negativities and kindle the light of knowledge,.

* धुर्यां लक्ष्मीम् अथमपि भृशं वेहि देव प्रसीद

(*Dhuryam Lakshmim Atha Mapi Bhrasham Dhehi Deva Prasida.*)

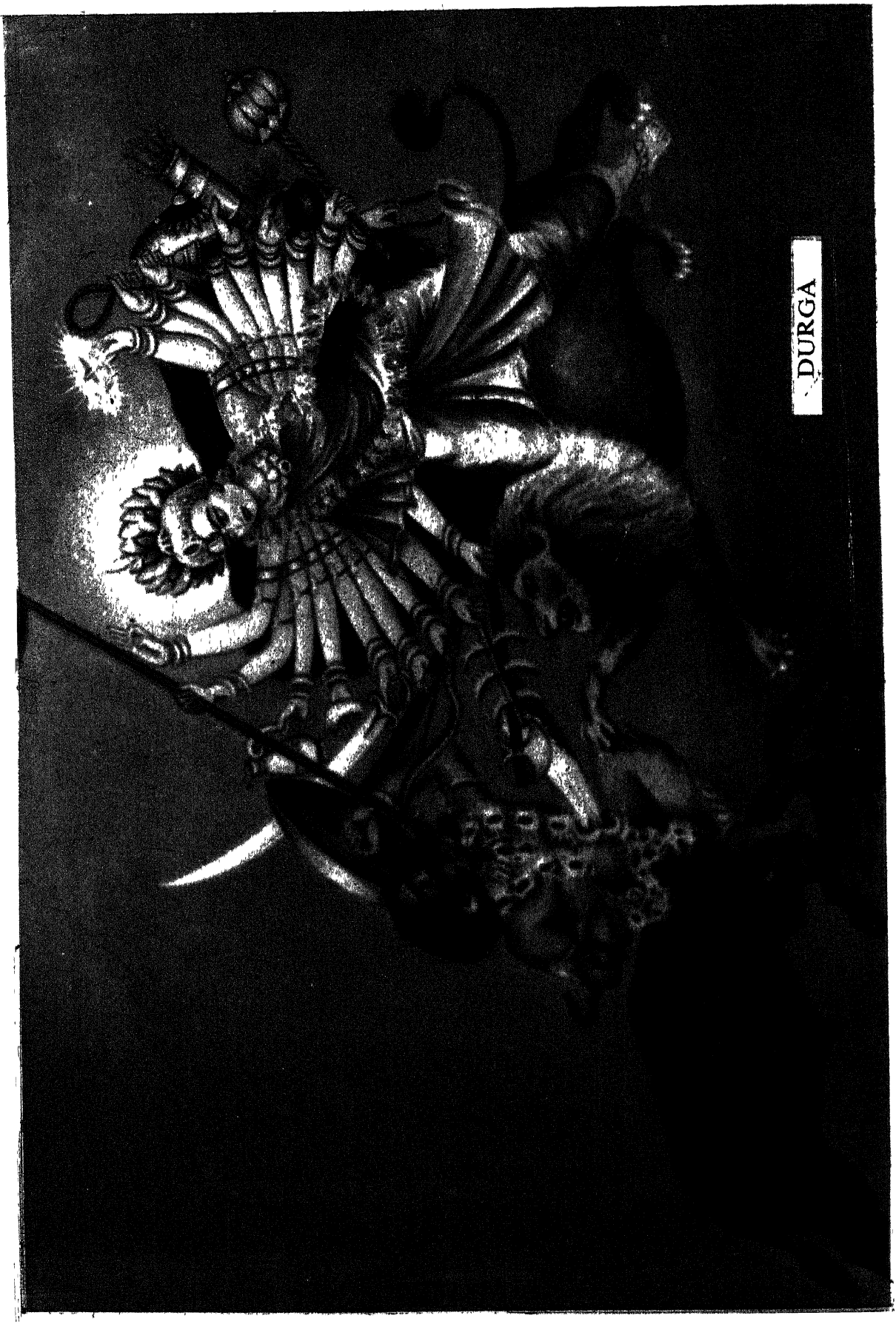
Jnanaishvarya-Sukharogya-Dhana-Dhanyadikam

Lakshya Yashyah Samuddishtam Sa Lakshmih Iti Kathyate

ज्ञानेश्वर्य-सुखारोग्य-धन-धान्यादिकम्

लक्ष्य यस्याः समुद्दिष्टम् सा लक्ष्मीः इति कथ्यते । चयत्

DURGA



9

DURGA

In the basic sense, the scriptures figure Goddess Durga as a protecting power. The most popular work describing her supernatural elemental powers is “*Durga Saptashati*” a collection of 700 verses on various aspects of the power and the glory of this popular deity of the Hindus worshipped throughout the length and breadth of the country. One is thrilled to see the devoted Bengali in the North observing various rituals in the month of Ashwina which falls around the English calendar month of October. One is equally impressed by the images of Durga in South Indian temples.

Etymologically, the word “Durga” suggests the concept of a fortress (the Sanskrit word “Durga” means fort, or a place which is difficult to approach or overrun). The goddess, thus is a protecting deity who brings succour to suffering humanity from corruption of body or mind, weaknesses of the flesh and consequent temptations and deficiency of the elements which make and keep man as man.

Historically speaking, the goddess is one of the earliest divine forms worshipped in India. She is mentioned in the early scriptures like the *Yajurvedasth*, *Vajasaneyi Samhitta* and *Taittarreya Brahmana*. She was worshipped then as Ambika and was believed to be the sister of Rudra, one of the several forms in which Shiva has been described. There are many incarnations of Durga. According to *Devi Bhagawat*, in one incarnation, she took the form of Daksha Prajapati’s daughter, Satī who, after years of devotion and prayers, got Shiva as her husband. Thus she became the mother of Ganesha and Kartikeya. ‘Devi Purana’ mentions her as the destroyer of

Durga, a formidable demon, and gives her the name which we are discussing here.

“Durga Saptashati” is in the form of a *litany*, which is most popular with the devotees of Durga. In one of its widely known verses it describes Durga as “Durgati nashini”, (दुर्गा—दुर्गति नाशिनी) the Divine Mother who, in her benign, protective mercifulness, ends the worldly and spiritual hurdles (adibhoutik, adhidaivik and adhyatmik obstacles) in the path of her children by fortifying what is good in them resolving their problems, ending their weaknesses and supplementing through her supernatural grace the deficiencies in their faint, ignorant or weak bodies and minds.

Thus this fortress and ultimate motherly resort of mankind represents the spiritual grace and succour on which much of the concept of divine motherhood is based in Hindu philosophy. The presence of Durga or Kali temples all over the country points to the spiritual continuity of a religious tradition and a strand of basic oneness in one multi-strengthened cultural way of life.

Durga belongs to the Shri Kula, the manifest world. Kali belongs to the unmanifest, casual world. Durga is the symbol of struggle for total victory over evil. Mahakali is the symbol of the struggle for attainment of divine grace.

So all that is sought to be symbolised through Durga relates to the world of action at the physical, mental and intellectual levels.

(दुः + ज्ञेय = दुर्ज्ञेयी इति दुर्गा)

(Duh + Jneya = Dujneyi iti Durga.)

There is another aspect. Durga* ‘Duh’—difficult ‘JNEYA’—to know also means one who is very difficult to know. Her powers are difficult to comprehend. It is difficult to realise the potential and possibilities of her grace. But there is no reason to be disappointed for she is the Divine Mother. Whosoever will approach

* Durga—the Goddess (is)

Durgati ...Misery.

Nashini —eliminator, destroyer (of)

The verse means “Goddess Durga is the eliminator of mankind’s misery.”

her as her child, will certainly get her full grace and care.

One of the abiding concepts of Durga is as a force of unity. She symbolises the united power of all divine beings. There is an illuminating legend in Devi Bhagwat : Demons, representing satanic elements fought for full one hundred years with gods, the forces of righteousness and defeated them. Mahishasur, a demon, usurped all the powers and kingdom of gods. The gods had to run for their lives.

In that state of shame and misfortunes, they approached Brahma who led them to a place where Vishnu and Shiva were sitting. The gods narrated the story of their defeat and of the great power of Mahishasura. They told the two great gods that Mahishasura had taken away all the power of Indra (the chief of Heaven), Surya (the Sun), Agni (Fire), Vayu (Air), Chandrama (the Moon), Yama (the God of Life). Varuna (the God of the Seas) and other devas and had become a nuisance to all of them. Mahishasura had turned all the Devas out of heaven who were moving about on the earth as ordinary beings. They requested the two great gods to devise ways and means to punish the demon.

On hearing this, the two great gods became infuriated. Their faces became red with anger. Their bodies started trembling. Their eyes emitted fire in all directions. The gods saw a huge mountain of fire whose flames were leaping in all directions. This fiery spectacle emanated from various heavenly bodies. It took the form of a woman whose dazzle illuminated the universe. Seeing this form, which represented the united force of all the forces of good, the Devas felt relieved.

Signs of hope started appearing on their faces. They saluted the Devi (goddess). Each one offered his best weapon to her. She was decorated with the most valuable dress and ornaments. All the gods honoured her in different ways. They sang hymns in her honour. Deeply moved, she thundered in righteous wrath which shook the whole universe. The sky started resounding with awe-inspiring sounds. The oceans had unusual tides. The earth began to shake. Mountains started trembling. The gods, deeply inspired,

shouted : “Devi, Victory is thine.” Saints and sages offered prayers to her.

Seeing the whole universe in a state of turmoil, the forces of evil became alert and got ready to fight. Mahishasura shouted in great anger : “What is this ? I shall eliminate that boastful tribe of gods.” He gathered his forces and ran in the direction from which the terrifying sound was coming. Going closer, he saw the Devi whose appearance dazzled the universe. The sound of her bow was terrifying. Mahishasura was dazed. A few moments later, the force of good and evil came to grapple with one another. Mahishasura, with his eight strong commanders—चिक्षुर Chikhsura, कराल (Kral) उद्धत (Udhat) चामर (Chamar) उदग्र (Udagrar) असिलोमा (Asiloma), बासकल (Bashkal), and बिडालाक्ष (Bidalaksha) and their forces, attacked the Devi and her followers. The battle between good and evil had begun.

Leaving the story here, let us briefly see the composition of this Devi from the powers and prowess of various divine forces.

<i>The Physical Attributes</i>	<i>Sources of Their Composition</i>
Face	Shiva
Arms	Vishnu
Hair	Yamraja
Breasts	The Moon
Middle of the waist	Indra
Thighs	Varuna
Buttocks	The Earth
Feet	Brahma
Fingers of the feet	The Sun
Fingers of the hands	Vasus
Nose	Kubera
Teeth	Prajapati
Eyes	Fire
Eyebrows	Evening (Sandhya)
Ears	Air
Ornaments	Kshira Sagara (Ocean)
Ever fresh garlands of lotus :	One of the Seas

After the form of the Devi was ready, the gods gave their choicest weapons to her in her 18 hands. She, thus, became Mahashakti, the wielder of supreme power.

The following are some important Durga symbols and their meanings :

<i>Symbols</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
Female form	Power of the divine
Eighteen arms :	Collective power of divine forces
Eighteen weapons :	eighteen qualities
Aksamala :	eternal sound
Parasu (Axe) with a sandal wood handle	destruction in kindness
Gada (Mace)	potential energy
Arrow :	straight to the target
Vajra (thunderbolt)	firmness in conviction
Padma (lotus)	serenity, depth and detachment
Dhanusa (bow)	deployment of full energy
Kundika (multi-pronged spike)	determined destruction of obstacles
Danda (baton)	discipline and system
Shakti (spike)	cosmic energy
Asi (sword)	discrimination
Dhala (shield)	forbearance and capacity to withstand all opposition
Kamandalu (bowl)	regulated use of energy
Ghanta (bell)	sound
Surapatra (wine casket)	periodic revitalisation
Shula (sharp-tipped iron rod)	unambiguous knowledge
Pasha (rope)	strategy in war against evil
Sudarshan Chakara (a disc shaped revolving missile)	ruthless destroyer of obstacles
Red dress	activity with knowledge
Riding the Lion as vehicle :	mastery over the situation
Battlefield background :	unreserved effort to eradicate evil.
Mahishasura : (demon)	wicked ego
Black male buffalo	tenacity of ego

Eighteen Arms :

These represent nine out of the ten avataras (incarnations). Tenth, the Kalki, is still to come and He is to represent the power and glory of all the past incarnations. Symbolising this idea in a human form each of the nine incarnations make the 18 hands of the Devi. This suggests that She represents the united forces of the Devas.

Eighteen Weapons :

These symbolise eighteen qualities. They are given below in the order in which “Durga Saptashatī” has mentioned them ;—

Akshamala (Aksh - Eye Mala - garland)
 Parashu (Pharasha-Axe)
 Gada - Mace
 Arrow.
 Vajra (Thunderbolt)
 Padma (lotus)
 Dhanusha (bow)
 Kundika (multi-pronged spike)
 Danda (baton)
 Shakti (spike)
 Asi (sword)
 Dhala (Shield)
 Kamandalu (bowl with handle)
 Ghanta (Massive bell)
 Surapatra (wine bowl)
 Shoola (sharp-tipped iron rod)
 Pasha (Rope)
 Sudarshana Chakara (A disc-shapped
 revolving missile).

Now we shall discuss the significance of some important weapons shown in popular drawings of the deity.

The word eye is meant to denote the subjective eye—the eye of deep understanding, precision and creative activity.

Akashamala :

It also symbolises the eternal sounds from A to Ksha in the Devanagari (Sanskrita alphabet). The word “mala” represents the united force of all the gods brought together through a common desire to defeat the demons. The beads are red, suggesting that this union is for activity at all levels. समानो मंत्रः समिति समानी (Samano Mantrah Samithih Samani)

In terms of modern science, a cohesive force binds the atoms of our objective world. Extending the symbolic representation to the subjective world, this would represent the world of conception as well. Literally ‘Aksha’ means “eye” and ‘mala’ “garland”. Therefore, Akshamala may also be taken as meaning may eyes seeing through the realities of life.

Parashu-Axe :

This is said to have been given by Vishvakarma to the Mother. Vishvakarma is the God of constructive activity. He is said to be the architect of the world. Parashu has a wooden handle which, in this case, is of sandalwood and its blade is made of bright and shining metal. The wooden part, and that too of sandalwood, symbolises “beautiful firmness”—firmness which is fragrant. It is pleasing.

The handle is long as compared to the metallic part. This means that sweetened firmness dominates the destructive process. This attitude is clearly visible from the general countenance of the Mother who, even though in the battle-field against a very cunning and powerful enemy, is completely relaxed.

Gada-Mace :

It symbolises the absolute power of the leader—the chief. She is the sole monarch in her field of activity. This also represents potential energy.³

Arrow :

A bunch of arrows has been given by Air, alongwith two different shades to keep them. They are (i) reddish-and-yellow, and (ii) reddish-white, having identically coloured arrows. The reddish-yellow arrows were used for attacks to kill the eight demon chiefs. Those chiefs were personifications of Rajoguna and Tamoguna. To eliminate them the Mother had to use appropriate weapons. The reddish-white arrows represent Satoguna activity. For killing Mahishasura, who was an embodiment of ego and ignorance, the Mother had to use the second type of arrows. Ego has a Satoguna aspect also. It is of far subtler nature than other inclinations of man. Arrow represents potential energy. It can be released only with the help of a bow which has to be pulled hard up to the ear. This is the process of converting potential energy into kinetic energy. Its movement is straight towards the target. This represents the proper conditions for achievement of the goal.

Thunderbolt :

It is said to have been given by Indra, the Chief of Heaven. Indra is the presiding deity of the mind also. The type of mind required for warfare is symbolised by the thunderbolt. It shows that one should be firm like it in one's convictions. There is no scope for doubt. Thunderbolt can break anything against which it strikes but it is not affected while striking. It is white. Its hardness signifies conviction—It knows no compromise. It is not affected by any challenge. Its attitude is : "come what may." Its whiteness symbolises purity. White light is said to be the combination of seven colours. Thunderbolt when moved for an attack, reflects the colour it comes across. When in motion it throws out fire. Hindu mythology says that thunderbolt of Indra is made of the bones of Dadhichi, the famous rishi. He was a great Yogi. He gave his bones for the forging of this weapon. Bones contain phosphorus and when exposed to air this chemical catches fire. The story is of great scientific value.

This thunderbolt has seven pointed, sharp edges, symbolising the seven colours in the spectrum of light which we see when after rain the rays of the sun fall on moist air-space. This indicates to its

origin from Sun. The Sun has the quality of dispelling all negativities and strengthening of all that is good.

Padma (Lotus) :

The lotus was given to the Mother by the seas. The seas represent serenity, depth and vastness. This lotus is not in full bloom. It symbolises certainty of success but not finality. Its red hue represents activity. Its petals overlap. Their sequence is usually in the 4-8-16 series. Its central stem is round. In its centre there is a regular geometrical formation like a Tantrika yantra. Lotus has many synonyms. Two of the better known are 'utpala' and 'pankaja'. Utpala has to be grown by sowing the seed. Pankaja can grow by itself from mud under water—'Panka'—mud; ja—'born of'. "Utpala" symbolises growth of the inner self in an interrupted, phased manner while "pankaja" stands for constructive and continuous evolution of the spirit.

Dhanusha-Bow :

It is said to have been given by Air representing motion like the arrows. It has potential energy when pulled up to the ear with full force. This converts into kinetic energy when arrow is released. This is the process of conversion of potential into kinetic energy. When with a definite goal in view, the seeker puts into practice all his force and concentration, his energy is destined to achieve the target. There is another aspect which is symbolised by the bow. The bow comprises a string which is straight and a frontal wooden part which is bent. They are connected at the two ends and are firmly tied. When the bow is pulled to the ear, it symbolises the effort to reach the goal. It takes a round shape which symbolises fullness. With that determination, with that conviction and with that force, one has to shoot one's target. Then alone success is possible. When used in the subjective sense, it means the final emancipation (mukti).

Kundika

Kundika is very peculiar weapon. It has pointed sharp nails all over and is very heavy. It is used for beaking hard pieces, that

is, for destroying large obstacles. It also represents all-out and determined effort to get over any obstacle.

Danda—Baton :

THIS is said to have been given by Yamaraja who symbolises perfect discipline or a sound system. The example of a sugarcane stick is often given in this respect. In a sugarcane stick you find that there are bulging intermittent rings. These rings are important to retain sweetness in the sugarcane. Likewise, in the danda, there are rings which symbolise the importance of a system and discipline in the course of any sadhana.

Shakti :

It is said to be given by the God of Fire. This is “vidyut shakti” (electric energy). When it is used, it emits fire. Fire has the capacity to destroy and to purify. Movement is caused by this cosmic energy. Shakti in the hand of the Mother symbolises the power of destruction for the purpose of reconstruction and purification.

Asi :

This weapon was not given by any god. It is the mother's own creation. It is white and shining. It is light and straight. It is sharp and pointed. It symbolises knowledge which has the sharpness of the sword. Enormous destruction was caused by the demons. The Mother's judgement fell on them and they were slain by this sword. This sharp-edged weapon symbolises knowledge. Its light weight teaches us that true knowledge does not sit heavily on any one.

Knowledge should be used to quell demoniac elements. This weapon has been used most in the war against evil. Symbolising that knowledge is the most important weapon to conquer evil. The sharpness and pointedness of the weapon suggest the penetrating element of superior knowledge and discriminating capacity. Knowledge, which is free from any doubt, is symbolised by the shining part of the sword.

Knowledge, which is fully under the control and care of one

who possesses it, is symbolised by the smooth and protected handle. This knowledge can distinguish between the relevant and the irrelevant, between right and wrong, between a friend and a foe. It destroys the areas of ignorance of the mind in one stroke and makes it illuminated. It is like darkness disappearing at the advent of light. Inner light never dawns in instalments. It comes like a torrent and floods the mind with illumination. This light made Gautama "The Buddha".

Dhala :

It is held in the front hand. It is there to symbolise defence. It is made of hippopotamus skin. The skin of this animal is exceptionally thick. It symbolises forbearance and capacity to withstand opposition. Its importance is further indicated by its position in the front. In any war against evil, there are bound to be quick offensives and movements of desperation and excitement. The shield protects the fighter (seeker) from all types of attacks. It is held firmly by the Mother with all the five fingers. Any instrument of defence requires conviction, firmness, energy and drive—symbolised by the five firm fingers. The five raised spots in the shield represent the five channels or five sides of attack and consequent defence kama, krodha, lobha, moha and ahamkara.

Kamndalu :

It is said to be given by Brahama, the Creator. The kamandalu's receiving part is wider than its distribution-end. It is made of sandalwood. This symbolises that one should acquire virtues diligently and then use them with care and proper regulation. This is planned economy. Gather power and prosperity in plenty, store them in a firm and secure manner. Keep them secure and under your control through a firm handle and use them in a planned manner. This system is necessary for any constructive activity which is the main role of Brahma, the Creator. This Kamandalu, being his contribution, signifies this aspect suggestive of his activity.

Bell :

It is said to have been given by Indra who took it from the

elephant named Airavata. This elephant is said to have four big teeth and ten tusks. The four teeth represent the four commonly known directions and the ten tusks represent their ten subtler angles. The bell of this elephant symbolises sound. Sound is the carrier of language. The language of war is courage, skill and fearlessness. The Mother, through this sound-making equipment, proclaims the invincibility of the gods over the demons, discouraging evil-doers and encouraging those on the correct path of Sadhana.

Wine Bowl :

It is said to have been given by Kubera, the lord of wealth. The bowl given by him, naturally, represents the intoxication caused by material prosperity. In the war against Mahishasura, Durga is said to have stopped fighting briefly to drink some elixir from the bowl as if to re-charge herself. It conveys the idea that in a fight against evil, one has to periodically revitalise oneself to conserve one's energy. This means that one should use one's resources to achieve good ends with the final aim of attaining emancipation (Mukti) or self-realisation.

Sharp-Tipped Iron Rod :

It is said to have been given by Lord Shiva. No authentic Durga image shows a trident. What is shown is only one pointed metallic weapon, one part of the trident. It is the central part. Durga finally kills Mahishasura, who is a symbol of ego and ignorance. The liquidation of Mahishasura is the liquidation of ego and ignorance by a sharp pointed weapon—representing unambiguous knowledge which is beyond doubt.

Rasha-Rope :

It has been given by Varuna. It suggests that with the force of attraction one should draw the enemy closer and then kill him. This is a war strategy. Lure the enemy into proximity, encircle him and then attack him.

The Mother looking relaxed amidst the surroundings of war, shows complete knowledge of strategies for victory. One who is in control of himself or herself inevitably wins.

Sudarshana Chakra :

It is said to be given by Lord Vishnu. This weapon of ultimate victory brings one in full view of one's object. A glimpse of that object drives away all obstacles. Literally, it means a beautiful sight —the sight of truth. (For details please refer to chapter on Vishnu).

Dress :

Mother is wearing red dress. This is in keeping with the function that she is to perform i.e. to destroy evil. As already said, red symbolises activity. Activity with knowledge is essential for the eradication of evil from outside as well as from within the human personality. The aspect of the divine mother under discussion is "Mahishasura mardini" (the destroyer of demon Mahisha — which symbolises ego).

Lion :

Lion is the carrier of the Mother in this war against evil. Lion represents power, will and determination. Lion is known for his sober habits. He does not attack unless hungry. He is never mean. There is royal majesty in his activity.

When in action, he is ruthless. Qualities of Lion symbolise the qualities required to meet the challenge of ego which is very wicked. Mother riding the lion in the war field symbolises her mastery over all these qualities. This suggests to the seeker that he has to have all these qualities in him if he wants to get over the demon of ego which is going to come on his way in many many forms, some time horrible, some time sweet, some time very deceptive.

Background :

Background is of a warfield. This symbolises all-out effort for the eradication of evil wherever it is, however it is. It is a challenge. It has to be met with total energy, mobilising all the forces and using all the means to attain victory. There is no place for half hearted effort. There is no place for doubts. There is no place for reservations. All this has been beautifully symbolised by showing The Divine Mother in action.

Mahishasura :

Next we take up Mahishasura : In Tantarika literature six types of sacrifices have been mentioned. Each one, when performed as a ritual, has a subjective bearing. Here also thinkers chose “particular animals” for sacrifice with a clear idea that bore some sort of similarity with the subjective faculty sought to be sacrificed in the fire of knowledge.

The first such animal is a *male cat* symbolising greed. Cats have an exceptional faculty to see through darkness. Likewise, greed can find its way through dark alloys of life. A greedy person has no scruples when it comes to attaining the objects he is seeking. Means have no meaning ; he must get what he wants. Self-respect, social norms or wrongness of deviation from the normal practice find no place in his ideology. He has a wonderful capacity to invent ways and means

The second sacrificial animal is a *camel*. It represents laziness (alasya). A camel has the capacity to keep sitting idle for hours together. It eats away all it gets—flowers as well as thorns. Like laziness, it also leaves one without the capacity to discriminate between good and evil and finally surrenders life to sloth.

The third sacrificial animal is a *ram* which represents anger. A ram is a fighting animal when it is trained for that purpose. But ordinarily it is not so. To prepare it for fighting, its horns are strengthened by certain techniques. Anger has to fit in a particular situation and get whipped up before it can manifest itself for dubious, destructive tasks. It must be eliminated to promote peace.

The next sacrifice is that of Man with vaulting ambition and uncontrolled passions and desires. Desire has many seductive faces. It betrays life to evil. It gives rise to harmful ambitions. By sacrificing such elements, the Mother shows the way to real peace of mind.

Then comes a sacrificial male buffalo. It represents ego in Tantrika literature. Ego or Ahamkara is born of ignorance. Ego can feed on false-hood and deception. A very dominating characteristic of the male buffalo is that if you take a piece of cloth near

it, it attacks you, presuming you are bringing another buffalo to fight it. A dog never attacks a presumed dog ; nor does a lion do so. Only the buffalo instinct imagines opposition and enacts a fight. Such imaginary fear or complex must be sacrificed if Sadhana is to progress.

The sixth sacrifice is that of a goat which symbolises lack of intelligence and unbecoming servility. Success in life depends in a large measure on intelligent planning and work, without the kind of docility which kills the sources of foresight and strength.

Form of Mahishasura :

Mahish means ; male buffalo. Asur means demon. Mahishasura symbolises the demon of ego in a human personality. Ego appears on our way in life in many forms. It has to be met with great care. To reproduce the story of the destruction of Mahishasura as given in the Devi Purana will be out of place here.

In that story, thinkers have tried to point out many many obstacles that come on the way of a seeker. Each chieftain of Mahishasura army and the vehicle used by him is the symbolic representations of those obstacles.

If you see carefully, Mahishasura body is seen grafted to the body of the male buffalo: Story goes on to state that when Mahishasura was cornered by Durga, he tried to get into the slain body of his carrier the Mahisha (male buffalo). A demon riding on a black male buffalo is to represent the power and a tenacity of the demon of ego.

It may be going too deep, but it is significant to note that Mahishasura was ultimately killed with the help of Shula, the central part of the Shiva's trident. Shiva, as we have discussed, is the Lord of destruction. He is also the benevolent Lord. This destruction is not for destruction's sake. Killing the demon of ego with the help of shula is to represent the sublimation of ego.

Durga has been shown in many forms. Some time she is shown with four hands, sometime with eight and some time with twelve. Instruments in her hands also differ in different pictures. All this is meant to convey the role of the divine forces in different complexes to meet different challenges from the evil.

Durga is one of the very popular forms of the Divine in the form of a Mother. She invokes a great sense of security. Night long chanting the name of the divine mother is a fairly common feature in India. We find her temples spread all over. You would find, may be just a small dome with a unspecified piece of stone being worshipped in the remotest corner of the Himalayas.

PART IV

SOME IMPORTANT DEITIES

Chapter X GANESHA—The Perfect Being

Chapter XI MAHAKALI—One Who Swallows Time.

Chapter XII NATARAJA—The Dancing God.

Chapter XIII SHIVALINGA—Symbol of The Absolute.



10

GANESHA

Ganesha enjoys a unique place in Hindu mythology. His blessings are sought at the beginning of any new venture. Whether it is construction of a new house, opening of a new accounts register in the beginning of a new year or initiation of a yajna (sacrificial worship) Ganesha is worshipped first.

It is believed that if the grace of Lord Ganesha is obtained, no undertaking can ever fail for want of material or spiritual support. There are numerous names given to this deity according to different attributes attached to the symbolic representation of a “perfect being”. Ganesha or Ganpati means the Lord of the multitudes. “Vighneshwara” means the God who removes all obstacles and ‘Vinayaka’ means the supreme leader.

Ganesha is also a symbolic representation of a man of perfection. Various Ganesha symbols, when put together, have many times been made a target of criticism by those who are ignorant of the meaning behind the “odd mixture” of human and animal parts in a divine form.

The worship of Ganesha does not mean the worship of an idol but a constant reminder of the value to be inculcated in the worshipper if he wants to attain the state of perfection. This may shock ignorant people, but the elephant-headed Lord of suspiciousness represents some of the highest and best ideas in our scriptures. Ganpati occupies a place of distinction in the Hindu pantheon. Let us go through the main Ganesha symbols :—

<i>Symbols</i>	<i>Simple Meaning</i>
1. Elephant head	A great head with an acute sense of discrimination.
2. Large ears	Continuous and intelligent listening.
3. Trunk	Efficiency.
4. Tusks (two)	Two factors to discriminate between wisdom and folly.
5. One broken tusk	One who has gone beyond dualism to make the right choice.
6. Wide Mouth	Endless appetite for life.
7. Big belly	Capacity to put up with auspicious and inauspicious experience of life.
8. One foot dangling down	Integrated mind and intellect coming in touch with reality.
9. Endless variety of edible stuff	Enjoyable glories of physical existence.
10. Musaka (Mouse)	Vain glory.
11. Four arms	Mind, intellect, consciousness ego. Or Mana, buddhi, chitta ahamkara.
12. Cutter in the upper right hand	Power to cut off gross material attachments. (through wisdom).
13. Pasha (Rope) in the upper left hand	Pulling one through love closer or nearer the truth.
14. Modak (Laddu) Sweet balls	Joys of sadhana.
15. Varada hasta (Blessing hand)	Blessing for devotees.
Let us elucidate them :—	

The Elephant Head :

A seeker must possess wide understanding. He should have a discriminating intellect. Both quantitatively and qualitatively an

elephant's head was found to be most suited to represent this aspect.

Large Ears :

The capacity for continuous and intelligent listening is another important quality required in a seeker. These have been represented by the large elephant ears. No other animal is known to possess such ears in size or quality. So this symbol was selected.

The Trunk :

It has a peculiar efficiency. It beats many achievements of man and his ingenuity in the scientific world. Here is a tool strong enough to uproot a tree yet delicate enough to pick up a pin from the ground. This range of adaptability is not known to any single man made instrument. A spanner used for tightening the bolts of a gigantic wheel cannot be used for repairing a lady's watch. This perfect discriminating adaptability in a perfect man can be used in the outer world for solving problems. At the same time, it can be efficiently employed in the subtle realms of the inner being.

Tusks :

Discrimination implies a choice, say, between wisdom and folly, good and evil, right and wrong. This choice is expressed in the two tusks.

One broken Tusk :

According to ancient legend, Ganesha lost one of his tusks in a fight with Parasurama. Parasurama, a legendary incarnation of God, went to the home of Ganesha's father, Shiva, but was denied access by Ganesha to the inner apartment. In the fight that ensued, one of Ganesha's tusks was broken.

Parasurama's mission as an incarnation of God on the earth was the destruction of pride and worldly vainglory, as symbolized by the Kshatriya (warrior) caste. His efforts to enter the inner apartment signify the efforts of divine grace to penetrate the soul of the devotee whose egotistical resistance is finally overcome when his ignorance is destroyed.

The broken tusk symbolises the man of discrimination, whose choice in the field of action is always the right one.

It is well known that left side is emotion dominated and right side is intellect dominated. Here, we find that the broken tusk is the left one. This symbolises the dominance of rationale over emotions.

Wide Mouth :

Ganesha's wide mouth represents endless appetite for life. Western scholars have made much of the supposed world—rejection of Hindu philosophy, but essential to that philosophy is the *right* acceptance of this world. As the *Isa Upanishad* says, "To enjoy all things with the joy of God, and not egoistically, is to find divine fulfilment in everything. With an attitude of non-attachment one should wish to live a hundred years." The wise man does not reject the world; he rejects but only those aspects of worldly life which diminish wisdom. His joy in goodness is unending.

Big Belly :

Ganesha lives spiritually centred in himself, and to him every experience, good or bad, is only a play of the Infinite. A man of perfection must have the capacity to stomach peacefully all the experiences of life—pleasant or unpleasant. Such a man finds fulfilment—soul's joy.

There is a story in the Puranas about this point. Once Lord Ganesha went to Kubera (the Lord of Wealth). Kubera had become very egotistical. He thought that he alone controlled the treasury of heaven. Kubera offered food to Ganesha with a show of ego. Ganesha, to teach him humility, disinterestedly consumed all the food and then started eating the utensils, the decorated canopy, the furnishings, etc. Still he was not satisfied. But then his father, Lord Shiva, approached him and gave him a handful of puffed rice to eat. Eating this, Ganesha was instantly satisfied. (Roasted rice represents ego sublimated through knowledge. When one's egotistical desires have been burnt, the inordinate enthusiasm for experiencing life also ends.)

One Foot Dangling Down.

Generally all of us move about the corridors of our experiences. We need "two feet" to move. They are mind and intellect. Mind here means flow of thought and desires. Intellect means the capacity to discriminate.

By showing a folded left leg, the rishis tried to represent that mind was folded into intellect or in other words it had become subservient to the intellect in a man of perfection.

Many Edible Things :

These represent enjoyable glories of physical existence. The world and its environment are waiting at his feet for his command. *Siddhis* (accomplishments) come to him as his servants. They wait for his command. He looks at them just casually. Normally, when some power comes to any one, he goes with self congratulation. He goes around exhibiting it. He may become its slave. With a true Yogi, it is the other way round. All cosmic forces come to seek shelter at his feet.

Musaka : (The Mouse)

The mouse is Ganesha's carrier, and seems laughably disproportionate to his great size. But we are dealing here with symbols, not with literal representations of reality. As a symbol, this familiar household nuisance is peculiarly appropriate.

The mouse is a creature that can quietly enter a structure through a small hole and nibble everything it finds inside. There is no purpose behind this activity, except gluttony. This is exactly the role that egoistical desire plays in our life. Ego can enter into the personality absolutely unnoticed, and then eat up all the good we have in us.

There are various kinds of such ego-satisfying desires : the desire for worldly pleasures relating to material prosperity ; the desire for domestic pleasures ; the desire for name and fame Even when one renounces worldly pleasures, one may be bitten by the bug of delusive renunciation. One desires recognition. In the name of service to humanity, one is motivated by the desire for name and fame, the last and most difficult thing to renounce.

In placing the mouse at Ganesha's feet, the rishis depicted the subservience of egoistical desire to the will of the wise man. The mouse's alert pose suggests ego active in its obedience to enlightened will. This is not a passive, spiritless ego that has been so often extolled by ignorant devotees as the mark of "saintly humility," but the joyous, ever-free ego that knows, it has no foundation, no reality, save in God.

The mouse's aloof position close to temptingly fresh food signifies an ego that, while living in the midst of worldly pleasures, is untouched by them. The difference between the yogi and the worldly man is not that the yogi turns away from the world in disgust, but that he is inwardly unaffected by conditions around him. He, too, enjoys the world, but he does so with the joy of God. He controls enjoyment ; it does not control him. When such a free soul wants to play a role on the divine stage of the earth for upliftment of humanity, his ego (without which he couldn't act as a man), remains ever his obedient vehicle, his instrument.

There is a story in the Puranas which gives a significant warning to those who laugh at the activities of such great souls. Ganesha once, while riding his seemingly inappropriate carrier, fell down. The Moon, beholding this comic spectacle, laughed. Ganesha forthwith cursed the moon, that no one in future would look at it (the Moon) on that day. In memory of this mythical curse, pious people in India avoid looking at the Moon on this day, the day of Ganesha "Chaturthi", the fourth day of ascending moon-fortnight. But this story also has a symbolic, not a literal, significance. When a man of perfection moves about in the world, indifferent to its lures, uninitiated people symbolized by the Moon, which according to conventional astrology stands for ego, may be inclined to laugh at him. Their sneering, however, incurs its own punishment. They are cursed by their own higher wisdom for their failure to see dispassion in apparent impracticability.

Any generation that mocks at great souls meets with degradation and disaster.

The Four Arms :

These represent the four main divisions of human conscious-

ness : mind, intellect, ego, and chitta (conditioned feelings, or likes and dislikes ; the emotional reactive process).

Vighneshvara (another name for Ganesha) represents pure consciousness which enables the aforesaid four components in man to be guided by the soul's wisdom, and thus always by right discrimination.

The hand represents the active principle in man's personality. Right-hand activities are dominated by intellectual considerations, while those of the left hand are dominated by emotional considerations.

The two frontal hands symbolize objective activity, activity directed towards the manifest world. The hands placed towards the rear symbolize subjective activity, or activity in the inner, unmanifest world. Four arms also convey the idea of four directions symbolising omnipresence and omnipotence. Interpretations may vary with the context.

The Cutter .

Cutter is an instrument of cutting and removing the undesirable. By showing it in the upper right hand, the idea desired to be conveyed is that such a master will first cut off the attachments of seekers who will approach him. He will remove their doubts and solve their mental problems. This being important intellect dominated subjective activity has been symbolised through a cutter in the upper rear right hand.

The Rope :

Basically rope is meant for pulling and tying. Placing it in the upper left hand, it is intended to convey that after a great master removes the doubts of his students with the help of wise explanations, he pulls them away from temptations with his love, and binds them to higher goals in life. Love is a great binding and corrective force. This activity being of a subjective and emotional quality has been symbolised by a rope in the upper rear left hand.

Modak (Sweet Ball in lower left hand) : The true guru bestows on his faithful disciples the gifts of inner, soul-joy, and also of out-

ward fulfilment. This is symbolised by the sweet ball in lower left hand.

Process of making “modakas” has a deep significance. Grams are first soaked in water. Their shells are removed. Then they are ground into a fine powder. This powder is roasted in Ghee (Butter). Powdered Sugar is mixed. Then this mixture is given a round balls formation. Lord Ganesha is very fond of Modakas. To endear one self to a great Guru, the disciple has to pass through the process of penance, discipline and purification. Then he has to serve the master with sweetness and pleasure.

The Right Hand in a Blessing Pose :

The ultimate gift of a great master is the blessing of deliverance from delusion. The raised right hand also signifies the blessing of protection from all obstacles on the spiritual path.

It may be interesting to note that there is a definite meaning behind the order of hands and objects shown in them. Evolutionary movement is always clockwise. First in the order is the cutter, then *rope*, then the sweet ball and then blessings. In the subjective process of evolution, first the doubts have to be removed, then a goal has to be fixed followed by experience of soul-joy and finally blessing of protection and deliverance.

Ganesha’s *Elephant Man-head* form is symbolically most appropriate. First, to attain perfection one must have the steadfastness and endurance of an elephant. The *Elephant’s Eyes*, too, are important. Elephants are said to have a visual peculiarity which causes them to see things larger than their actual size. Thus, Ganesha’s eyes give us the great message that if we want smooth sailing in life, we should give full honour and respect to others, and see ourselves as relatively small and insignificant. Modesty and humility shield one from much opposition and obstruction. It is our egotism that provokes the ego of others, bringing them into conflict with us. What better symbol, than an elephant’s eyes can there be to convey the idea of gentle humility ?

The Human Body :

It is the most important part of the symbol of Ganesha. It

suggests that one who does not want obstructions in one's path to self-realization, should emphasize one's humanity over basic animal nature. Above all one should have a human heart, with kindness, compassion, and worshipful love of truth.

Ganesha's Body :

It has been shown in golden colour wearing yellow clothes. Yajnopavit (sacred thread) is adorning his body.

Golden colour is the combination of red and yellow. Red colour symbolises activity. Yellow symbolises purity and peace. Ganesha is the lord of activity from objective to subjective, from worldly to divine, that is what is desired to be conveyed through golden body.

Ganesha is shown wearing *yellow clothes*. They are only partly covering his body. This symbolises that activity of the great master is mostly open and clothed with purity and peace.

Number of threads in a Yajnopavita, number of knots and the length of this sacred thread all have philosophical meaning. But this would suffice to mention here that Yajnopavita symbolises austerity and purity, which is essential for journey within.

The *Crown* on Ganesha's head symbolises sovereignty and power.

This is in short meaning of some of the symbols. Lord Ganesha has been shown in many poses, holding different objects in his hands. Some time he is shown sitting, some time standing and some time in a dancing pose. Position of legs, hands and trunk during the course of dancing is meant to convey a definite philosophical meaning. In some pictures we find a snake tied round his big belly. He is said to have two consorts *Buddhi* (intellect), and *Siddhi* (mastery) and two sons namely *Kshema* (genuine needs) and *Labha* (gain). Sitting positions of his consorts and children and the position of their hands all have definite philosophical meanings. It may be mentioned here that every God or Goddess has meaning in three contexts i.e. *adhibhoutika*, *adhidaivika*, and *adhyatmic*, material, mental and spiritual.

There are eight known *Avtaras* of Ganesha :

(i) वक्रतुण्ड (Vakratunda), (ii) एकदन्त (Ekdanta), (iii) महोदर (Mahodara), (iv) गजानन (Gajanana), (v) लम्बोदर (Lambodara), (vi) विकट (Vikata), (vii) विघ्नराज (Vighnaraja), (viii) धूम्रवर्ण (Dhumravarna).

Detailed study is a subject for an independent volume.

Ganesha is one of the very popular gods. His temples are spread all over India and many part of the world like Java, Bornio, Nepal, Cambodia etc.



MAHAKALI

11

MAHAKALI

The word “Kala” means Time—Absolute Time taken for the movement of electrons round protons. It is the time between Creation and Destruction. It is the time between two varying states which may be at the micro or macro level. The Absolute Time concept is denoted by the word “Kala”.

Kali is the power that swallows Time and brings the whole play of Time in nature to a point of rest. She activates it towards fresh creation. This play of destruction and re-construction after annihilation in terms of Time is denoted by the word KALI.

The word ‘Maha’ is added to ‘Kali’ to convey the idea of Timeless Time in relation to the known concept of time in reference to human mind.

The Trinity and their counterparts have been viewed from two different angles. From the viewpoint of activity in the manifest world the combination is as follows :



This pairing has been shown to denote the manifestation of activity.

The second combination we come across is based on the natural affinity of colours and temperament.



We see that Kali is the Counterpart of Lord Shiva for the purpose of activity in the manifest world. Activity is promoted when one step is given up to take the next. A seed dies in order to give birth to a plant. A flower dies to give place to a fruit. This is the cycle of destruction and creation. Unless one dies another cannot be born. Goddess Kali promotes this process.

Kali is occasionally described as the Goddess of destruction, but this is only partly correct. When all merges into one, this is destruction and when many come out of one, it is creation. When activity comes to a state of rest, this may be called destruction, but the moment it moves again for fresh activity, this amounts to creation. In Nature, this cycle goes on in the field of time. Looking from one side Kali, who is the Goddess of destruction, can be the Goddess of Creation also. Saraswati is *not* known as the Goddess of Creation, she as Brahma's consort, is worshipped as one who gives wisdom to all living, thinking creations. With this background, we shall take up the various Kali symbols and ideas :—

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|--|---|
| 1. Evening in the battle field
(Godhuli vela) | Union of two opposites in the activities of life. |
| 2. Dark-red clouds. | Retarded activity. |
| 3. Open hair (Mukta Keshi). | Free from all fetters. |
| 4. Three eyes. | Spectator of the three states—wakefulness, dream and sleep. |
| 5. Moon on the head
(Chandra Shekhara). | Evolution. |
| 6. Smiling face. | Joy. |
| 7. Red tongue amidst white teeth. | Activity conditioned by Satoguna. |
| 8. Red tongue protruding and slanted downward. | Retardation of activity. |
| 9. Digambari (Naked) | Natural state. |

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|---|--|
| 10. Four Arms. | Artha, Dharma, Kama and Moksha. |
| 11. Left upper hand (frontal) holding a human head. | Step to control constant activity. |
| 12. Left lower hand (back) holding a bowl made of human skull. | Merger of activity into a state of rest. |
| 13. Right upper hand (back) holding a sword with an eye etched on it. | Discriminating knowledge. |
| 14. Sword partly immersed in blood. | Merger of activity in non-activity. |
| 15. Right lower hand (frontal) (Varada hasta). | Hand that grants boons to devotees. |
| 16. Rounded breasts full of milk. | Capacity to nurse the creation, power to maintain the world. |
| 17. Childlike appearance. | Childlike naughtiness and innocence. |
| 18. Cut arms around the waist. | Perishing physical world. |
| 19. Garland of 50 slain heads. | 50 letters denoting the spoken language, root of all the mantras |
| 20. Mahakala. | Nature without activity. |
| 21. Cremation Ground. | Constant destruction. |
| 22. Silent Damaru. | Inactive Shabda Brahma. |
| 23. Trident. | Dispeller of doubts and eliminator of problems. |
| 24. Elephant skin. | That which merges twice. |
| 25. Small snake sleeping on the body of Mahakala. | Time (Past). |
| 26. Big snake around Mahakala standing with an open hood near his head. | Time (Present & Future). |
| 27. Colour of the body of Mahakala (white or smoky). | Satoguna-dominated nature. |

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|-----|---|--------------------------------------|
| 28. | Mahakala lying relaxed. | Neutral state of nature. |
| 29. | Mahakali's right foot touching the chest of Mahakala. | Prompting the creator to create. |
| 30. | Left foot firm on the ground. | Further creation with determination. |
| 31. | The blue body of Mahakali. | Omnipresence. |

Evening

The Goddess is standing in the battle field representing the struggle in the creation and the constant fight between the pairs of opposites. It is evening when day and night meet.

Red and dark clouds symbolise the Rajoguna activity merging into Tamoguna. Movement is coming to a state of rest, a neutral point, which in reality is a recharging stage for further activity for creation. It may look like a moment of destruction but it is merely preparation for fresh creation. Evening suggests retardation of activity. Every thing is supposed to move to a state of rest (Vishrama). This background, in short, is the essence of this symbolic representation of Mother Kali, one who swallows Time.

काल गृस्यति या सा काली

“*KALAM GRASYATI YAH SA KALI*”

“Kala” (Time) is correlated with activity. There is no Kala where there is no activity. Merger in the Divine is Pralaya (Final dissolution) and separation from Him into many forms is creation. This is the principle which is here to represent Pralaya (dissolution) but of a creative type.

Open Long Dark Hair :

Long thick hair of a woman is considered to be beautiful. Hair represents desire. Their formation represents inclination for various achievements. In some parts of India, when a man is alive, his wife decorates her hair, embellishes it in various styles and makes it look glamorous. The motive is the desire to please the husband. If the husband dies, the woman unties her hair and never ties it again, symbolising that she has to live a life of austerity. She wants to attain a state of freedom from desires.

In a broader concept, Mukta Keshi here means free from desires, from any mental conditioning or artificiality.

Mukta Keshi :

In a broader concept, “*Mukta Keshi*” here means free from desires, from any mental conditioning or artificiality.

Dark hair represents Tamoguna. When activity comes to a stop, it is the state of Tamasa, the dark state of inactivity.

The setting sun in the background tinges the outer fringes of the wavy hair with a soft red hue. This symbolises Rajoguna flowing into the restful realm of Tamoguna.

Three Eyes :

They represent Drashta (दृष्टा) who can see beyond the pair of opposites and beyond the three gunas. They signify “Chaitanya Drishti”—(चैतन्य दृष्टि) the ever conscious, all pervading sight. It is only possible in a liberated being.

The position of the two eyes on the sides is important. The eyes are open. The white is tinged with red. It symbolises intoxication. The third eye is in a verticle position. It is open. The two side-eyes have the capacity to see sideways and also in the front. The third eye can only see straight. That is why it is called the eye of discrimination. Discrimination knows no diversions. Its razor cuts directly. There is no room for a compromise.

If you observe carefully, there is a white moon shaped brilliant streak between the two eye-brows and a point over it. This is red. This moon-shaped streak is the moon in its early ascending stage representing growth. This shows Satoguna and the point above is indicative of Rajoguna. Both faculties are necessary for a journey towards perfection. Taking it as a whole, the three eyes represent the three Gunas, or Time-past, present and future and the stage of Chaitanya drishti, the power to see through things. The eyes are full of affection and are relaxed even in a battle-field. This further strengthens the argument that the whole activity of Kali is performed in a state of Ananda (happiness).

Chandra Shekhara :

The moon on the right side of the mother is ascending and is not in an elementary stage.

The moon, as we already know, represents two things, divine source of sustenance and movement towards perfection. Its colour being white, it represents Satoguna. The ascending order represents not the beginning of the creation but some stage above it. This, being on the left side, symbolises the process dominated by love—love in a broader sense. The moon also represents systematic movement in contrast to haphazard movement. This definition leads us to believe that the Mother, by carrying the moon on her left side, is the force behind creation, sustenance and destruction, carefully carrying it forward to perfection.

Smiling Face :

Kali is seen always smiling. This symbolises the idea that she is enjoying her whole act as a play, the play of creation, sustenance and destruction.

Protruding Tongue :

We find that Kali has a long protruding tongue. To a casual observer this may look absurd as many other symbols do. On the one hand you show the Mother as grown up lady and on the other you let her show her long tongue—like a child. Mark the colour of the long tongue. It is bright red. It represents Rajoguna and the white teeth near it represents Satoguna. The tongue being pressed by teeth and it is hanging downwards. This means this whole activity is deliberate. Rajoguna is being pressed by Satoguna. This is to represent the process of retardation of Rajas by Satva. This is a systematic retardation into a state of rest. There is no undue force to be used. The teeth are not biting into the tongue. This reminds me of a very useful piece of advice given to me by a great saint in the Himalayas. He said to me : “Befriend your mind and treat it affectionately and carefully”. Psychiatrists also give the same advice.

Activity is here being pressed softly by Satoguna by pure thoughts and clean actions to bring it to a point of rest. This point

is the take-off pad for the flight to the highest spiritual region.

Naked Figure :

It symbolises a state free from all conditionings. Kali is in her neutral state. This is the Brahmi Sthiti (the state of divinity of the Mother). This is the state beyond the three Gunas and the pairs of opposites, beyond body, mind and intellect—in short beyond all conceivable coverings. Amongst sadhus, there are groups which are called Nagas and Digambars. The Hindus have their “Nagas” and the “Jains, Digambars”. They wear no clothes and are considered to be emancipated living beings.

Four Arms :

These represent all pervasiveness. They also represent Artha, Dharma, Kama, Moksha. The four basic faculties are represented by four goddesses :—Ichchha (will or wish) represented by Mahakali, Kriya (action) represented by Mahalakshmi, Jnana (knowledge) represented by Mahasaraswati and Prajna (the highest state of knowledge and intelligence) represented by Maheshwari. In other words, this symbol of four arms is used to symbolise omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience. There are two arms which are the usual (frontal) arms and two which arise from the rear of the two frontal arms. The two frontal arms represent scope of activity in the objective world or the manifest world and the two rear arms represent the activity in the unmanifest world.

Frontal Hand : Raktabija :

Raktabija is composed of two words, ‘Rakta’ and ‘bija’. Rakta means blood and bija means seed. Raktabija means one whose blood acts as seed. In other words every drop of his blood is a potential demon like him. The moment it falls on the ground, it takes the form of another Raktabija, as many drops so many Rakta-Bijas. A mythological story says that when Mother Kali noticed the multiplication of Raktabija in the war against evil, she took due care that no drop of blood from his body fell on the ground. Raktabija here symbolises unending desires. When one desire is slain, many more crop up. It is not by killing or suppressing the desires that one can get rid of them. Desire has to be rationally

analysed and incapacitated from further germination by affectionately holding the mind and letting it slowly exhaust itself in the intellect prepared by the fire of knowledge. This process is represented by slaying the demon with the help of 'khanda' (a small broad sword) held in the right hand of Mother Kali.

She is shown holding a freshly slain head in her left (frontal) hand in an upper position. This represents the objective importance of this action. Holding in the left hand means handling the discriminated desire with kindness and letting it slowly exhaust itself in the human skull which is painted white from inside (explained under the next heading).

Friendly and discriminative treatment to the desires is what is advised by this important symbol. It is not helpful to be harsh or ruthless. Suppression creates obsession in the human personality.

This weakens the inner strength to face the challenge at any level whether it is from world outside or from within ones own self. That is what we find in many seekers who go away from public contact and try to get over their desires by penance. They easily fall deep into the traps of Maya when they come in contact with the world again.

There is a great lesson in this symbol which every seeker has to clearly understand. This is so true in our every day living as it is on the path of perfection. All psychological disturbances that we find in the individual are caused by mishandling the mind and desires arising therefrom. Modern psychology stands testimony to this.

Bowl of Skull :

The function of this hand is connected with upper hand which is holding the head of Raktabija. This hand is holding a bowl made of human skull. Fresh blood dropping from the head of Raktabija, the demon is falling right into this bowl.

The whiteness inside this bowl represents Satoguna and the bowl of human skull symbolises a state of desire which has been burnt in the fire of knowledge and understanding. Whatever is left there is just to allow one to carry on with the day to-day activities of life

without any conspicuous desire. Drops of blood falling into the bowl represent the merger Rajoguna into Satoguna. Rajoguna has been separated from its generator. It has lost its capacity to increase. It has been sublimated into Satoguna.

In the hands of the Mother such symbols represent the deliberate process of bringing all agonising activity to the “zero point”. This kind of process is going on in our lives. Even diseases come to us to purify our bodies for a better life. Change of state is always for evolution. Such change takes place in the state of zero or, in other words in the state of non-activity. You have to let the seed lie undisturbed before it can sprout.

बिरजा विपत्मा प्रकृति भूयासम स्वाहा

(*Viraja vipatma prakriti bhuyasam swaha*)

For any new creation, activity must come to a state of non-activity.

Khanda

The sword (Khanda) is broad, bright and white. It is shining. It represents “Satoguna”, knowledge. Knowledge can be of many types. It can be the knowledge of a thief, a robber or a cheat. It can be the knowledge of a businessman, or of tricks to invest money to make more money. Here the sword represents knowledge of the Satoguna kind which cuts the negativities. It is meant to lead Man to emancipation—to the state of perfection. The eye therein represents the vigilant eye of discrimination. This being again a subjective intellectual process, the sword is held in the right rear hand of Kali.

The position of the sword is suggestive of deliberate and determined activity to cut out the problem of Rajoguna. It is like taking out a thorn with the help of another thorn but the functions of both are different.

The sharp edge of the sword is shown dipped in fresh blood. This is to symbolise the merger of activity into non-activity with determination and wisdom.

The sword is worshipped independently in many parts of the

1. [Shakta Pramod—Kali Tantram—P. 35 Venkateshwar Press, Bombay.]

country on various occasions. It is a symbol of strength in such cases.

‘Varada Hasta’

This hand is held in a blessing posture. This is to carry forward the idea that Kali destroys to create. For all types of ailments, whether they are physical, mental or spiritual nature, she has the right remedy. This hand reassures those who are already on the right path.

Breasts Full Of Milk :

They suggest that the Mother is ready to nurse the creation. She is not only willing but she is anxious to do so. Her youth and postures are suggestive of determination and vigour to destroy decaying aspects of Rajoguna and create a new world. It is not destruction for destruction's sake. It is for reconstruction. Kali is equipped to care and nurse the new creation to state of beauty and grace.

Child-Like Appearance :

Like a naughty, innocent girl Kali is always ready to make her devotees happy with her innocent ways. She is not whimsical ; she is affectionate. She is naughty but conscious of the feelings of others. This also suggests that she is enjoying the whole drama.

Cut Arms :

When we see the cut arms, which are fresh in appearance, made into an ornament and hanging round the Mother's waist, we come to realise that this symbol is there to convey that the result of actions or the fruits of actions are to be humbly offered to the Mother.

Chopped off hands can be compared to potential energy and moving-living hands can be compared to kinetic energy. The cut hands suggest that kinetic energy has come to a stop. They have not been discarded or thrown off. The hands which symbolise energy have been collected fresh and preserved. They represent in the form they are shown, sources of action preserved for use in further creation.

Garland of Slain Heads :

This garland shows slain heads from which blood is dripping

There are 50 heads. They represent 50 potential letters of the Devanagari alphabet. They are Rajoguna-dominated. Dripping blood symbolises Rajoguna.

The garland, having a common, unifying thread and put around the Mother's neck, is a medium for use in fresh creation. At this stage she is in the process of unification. The heads are woven together. "Word made flesh is God," say Christian scriptures. "Shabda Brahma" (शब्द ब्रह्म) is the same concept. From the 50 letters emerges the total variation of the rhythm of the created universe. By wearing the 50 symbolic heads around her neck, Kali is proclaiming to the world her power of fresh creation. She, as the sustaining source, is ever ready, to help the growth of a new order of life. Here we find Mahakali's function close to that of Vishnu, the sustainer of the universe.

Mahakaala :

We find Mahakala in the midst of flames "*Jwalitam Pavaka Madhyastham*". (ज्वलितम् पावकमध्यस्थम्) The flames are bright, symbolising Rajoguna. They are ready to destroy. But this is the destruction of autumn to herald spring, of seed to foster the growth of a tree. In the midst of that burning fire, Mahakala is lying relaxed and inactive. This symbolises the changeless aspect of consciousness.

Cremation Ground :

By showing Mahakali in a cremation ground in weird surroundings, the rishis have tried to convey in the subtle sense, that decay starts in eight different ways. These ways are related to :

(i) पृथ्वी Prithvi (Earth)	(ii) जल Jala (Water)	(iii) अग्नि Agni (Fire)	(iv) वायु Vayu (Air)
(v) आकाश Akasha (Sky)	(vi) मन Mana (Mind)	(vii) बुद्धि Buddhi (Intellect)	(viii) अहंकार Ahamkara (Ego)

Even time is fleeting and it is decaying in eight different ways by eight different elements given above.

Silent Damaru And Trident :

The silent Damaru and the firm Trident respectively represent silent Shabda Brahma (word) and the remover of the physical, mental and spiritual obstacles of mankind. This silent Damaru is sounded by shiva when he intends to awaken the dormant forces of creation. The Damaru appears ready for use by its position.

Small Snake :

It is usually shown on the supine body of Mahakaala. It represents time which has already passed the past.

Big Snake :

The big snake around the neck of Mahakaala, with its hood near the right foot of the Mother, represents the present. The portion of the snake around the neck of Mahakaala represents future. Here we find all the three stages of time, symbolising Total Time.

The position of the hood is alert and anxiously waiting for Mahakaala to get up and recreate.

The colour of the body of Mahakaala is subdued white, representing Satoguna in a state of complete rest. This is the state of Brahman. It is the illuminating transcendental aspect of consciousness.

We find the left foot of the Mother on the ground and the front part of the right foot touching the left side of the chest of Mahakaala. This is significant. In Kamashastra various nerve centres have been described which, when tickled, cause various types of emotions. Thinkers in India had studied this aspect in details and formulated psychological and literary norms which received authenticity in the course of time from other thinkers.

These came to be known as Kamasutras. The Hindus have never despised sex as an abominable emotion. They have studied, practised and evolved theories. Eroticism has found both literary and pictorial illustrations in India.

The placing of the right foot of Mahakali on the left side of the chest of Mahakaala is an erotic act. It is there to tickle Mahakaala to create. Tickling with the right foot the left side of the

chest is rather significant. This rationally represents inspiration for creation tending towards perfection.

The left foot on the ground suggests that in this process of creation, there has to be a rational and not mere emotions. Mahakaala is lying absolutely relaxed in neutral state but he is ready for future activity as and when desired by the Mahakali.

Blue Body :

The colour of the body of Mahakali is blue. Blue is the colour of the sky, a divine colour. It represents omnipresence, like the sky. It symbolises total absence of illusion. This is the colour of Brahman. Mahakaala is ABSOLUTE TIME and Mahakali is the driving force of this Mahakaala. All time merges into her. She is the confluence of the present, the past and the future. That is why she has been glorified from time immemorial by Indian saints, sages and the common man as one universal source of recreation after each cataclysmic state of destruction.

The Mother never really destroys. She blesses, creates and helps us see ourselves in the true mirror of her grace. "Namastasyai" says the devotee. "Salutation to Her". And the riddles of death, birth and rebirth are solved by this loving Mother of all !



12

NATARAJA

The Scriptures say that God is the dancer who is hidden in animate and inanimate objects like fire in the wood and makes them dance with His power.

This Dance symbolises the five functions of the Supreme. They are, सृष्टि Srishti (creation) स्थिति Sthiti (sustenance) संहार Samghar (destruction) तिरोभाव Tirobhav and अनुग्रह Anugraha (benevolence). These five functions have been symbolised by the activity of the supreme in the form of Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra Maheshwara and Sadashiva, respectively. This cosmic activity is the main subject of the dance. The thirty sixth stanza of “Unmyvilkam” states that :

‘The World is created by the Damaru, the protecting hand protects it, the fire destroys it and the raised foot liberates it.’

This dance constantly goes on both in the objective and subjective worlds. In the objective world, Supreme dances with the five mahabhutas (elements) in the subjective world it goes at the level of heart and soul.

Destruction here does not mean in the literal sense annihilation. It means change of scene.

Mudra and Abhinaya form a vital part of any dance. They are important media to convey subtle and delicate thoughts in a

Authorities on Nataraja in Tamil Language (S. India)

1. उशामई विलक्कम्
2. तिरुमूलर कृत तिरुमन्त्रम् का नवा तन्त्र तिरुकुटदर्शन (Vision of Divine Dance)

simple manner. Many dance forms in India have spiritual origin. Lord Shiva is considered to be the Lord of this medium of expression which is prevalent in India from time immemorial. Indian thinkers and artists found a marvellous unity of science, art and religious fervour in the sculptural representation of the Dancing Shiva—Nataraja.

This symbol has inspired artists and spiritual seekers down the ages. It is beautiful and significant. There is a deep philosophical truth contained in this symbol which apparently looks nothing more than a dancing pose. Let us look briefly at the symbols and their connotations :—

<i>Symbols</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
Four Arms	Four directions.
Damaru in the upper right hand.	Nada, sound, creation.
Upper left hand in a half moon gesture holding a flame.	Destruction.
Lower right hand in a protective pose.	Blessing.
The lower left hand turned inward and pointing towards a foot.	Discrimination.
Raised left foot.	Optimism for evolution.
Right foot on the dwarf.	Control over falsehood and illusion through knowledge.
A struggle in dwarf.	Captivity of falsehood, and illusion
Ring of flames.	The cosmic dance of nature.
Matted locks.	Power and source of all movements in life.
The Ganges.	Purifying water.
The Crescent moon.	Promise of a fulfilled life.
Serene face.	Self-inquest and composure.

Why did rishis and artists depict Shiva in this pose ? One is intrigued to note that this dance is composed of an apparent rhythmical frenzy.

The Creator has two facets, one active and the other passive—सक्रिय “Sakriya” and निष्क्रिय “Nishkriya”, निष्क्रिय ब्रह्मन् Nishkriya Brahman is Shiva साक्षीचेता केवलो निर्गुणश्च, Sakshi Cheta Kevalo Nirgunashcha and सक्रिय ब्रह्मन्, “Sakriya Brahman is Shakti” (his consort) स्वभाविकी ज्ञान बल क्रिया च, Swabhaviki Jnana Bal Kriya Cha.

We come across three significant words in this connection. “Nrit”, means movement of limbs in a pleasing way, “Nritya” means movement of limbs with precision for the purpose of expressing a particular sentiment (bhava) and “Natya” means movement of limbs to convey a particular incident or story. All of them, in common language, are called dance but the suitable differences have to be kept in view.

The difference in Active and Passive Brahman gets dissolved in the dance (nrit) of creation, preservation and destruction of the universe. The passive one becomes active and the active becomes passive. Sometimes Maya (Parvati) becomes the spectator while Shiva (Brahman) dances. Some times Shiva becomes the spectator and Maya (Parvati) performs the dance. And some times both dance together. The substance of the universe is called the “pleasure dance” (lasya nritya) of Shiva and its destruction is called the frenzied dance (Tandava).

Shiva, the Maha Yogi, dances for us. He dances for his creation. Even when He is performing the dance of destruction, he is preparing for a new creation.

DESTRUCTION : This is the law of the universe. Both these functions are symbolised by Natraja with little variations.

There are deeper meanings contained in this artistic figure. We shall take them up one by one.

Four Arms :

They are indicative of the four directions. They also represent

-
1. Shvetashvropanishad Shlok 11.
 2. Shvetashvropanishad Shlok 8

omnipotence. The constitution of the arms is indicative of strength.

Damaru in the Upper Right Hand :

It represents Nada or Shabda (the primordial sound). This symbolises Rajoguna or the activity. All languages, all music and all knowledge find expression through sound.

Sound finds expression through fifty matrika letters. Many potentially possible forms are contained in these matrika sounds. In the process of evolution, when these matrika sounds undergo permutations and combinations, these potential forms materialise.

“Hathayogapradipika”, a venerated treatise on yoga, says : “Whatever is heard in the form of sound is Shakti. The absorbed state (laya) is that in which no form exists.”

Tantra classifies the manifestation of primordial sound into four stages : परा para, पश्यन्ति pasyanti, मध्यमा madhyama, and वैखरी Vaikhari. The para sound, the unmanifest stage, is the starting point. This para point is elongated by another sound effect called pashyanti. Sound thus spreads in different directions (dik). The word pashyanti means seeing. In other words at this stage sound emerges towards the visible. After this, sound starts crystallising into forms. Sound becomes light—the luminous sound. At this stage, it is called madhyama. This luminous sound then begins to form patterns, curves, and enclosures. This makes definition of space possible. In this way the para sound becomes accessible to human experience, and is known as vaikhari. This stage has infinite possibilities of permutation and combination through the medium of matrika sounds. That is how languages are evolved.

Ajit Mookerjee in Tantric Art states :

“All the objects that we see and feel in this universe from thought or idea to matter, are sounds of particular concentration. Every object consists of a certain density of sound.”

“The principle behind this is that just as each form is the visible product of an energy pattern rooted in sound, so recipro-

cally, each visible form carries with it its own implicit power-pattern.”

The shape of the damaru is significant. It is made up of two parts. They represent Nature and Energy which in the hands of the Lord combine for the purpose of creation and pulsation of life in inert matter.

Upper Left Hand Holding A Flame :

Fire is the symbol of destruction as well as purification. The flame symbolises the power of destruction which comes into play to give rise to a purified, new creation. This symbolises Tamoguna (inactivity).

In one hand there is the fire of destruction and in the other the hope of creation. A seed loses its identity to give birth to a sapling. A sapling does so to give birth to a plant. A plant is transformed into a tree. This process goes on in Nature all the time. The end of one form is the beginning of another. Creation and destruction are the counterparts of the same cosmic principle. These are two aspects of life. In life and death, or death and life, this cycle goes on eternally. He who is born must die and he who is dead must be born again. जातस्य हि ध्रुवो मृत्युर्ध्रुवजन्ममृतस्य च : (Jatyasya hi dhruvo Mrityuh Dhruvam Janma mritasya cha). It is a continuous process of regeneration and renewal. To appreciate this one needs an appreciation of the fact of unnecessary attachments. Most of us are possessed by possessions.

Lower Right Hand In A Protective Pose :

The Lord comes to our rescue and shows us his right hand. It is in अभय मुद्रा “abhaya mudra”. It signifies protection and peace मा भैषी : “Ma Bhaishī” i.e., “Don’t be disturbed.” He seems to be saving. “There is nothing to fear. You are the children of immortality. I am with you.”

Fearlessness comes from the knowledge of the ephemeral nature of the world of change—the world of matter.

Most spiritual illustrations show the reassuring abhaya mudra Krishna, the Buddha, Christ, Nanak and others have been depicted

thus. Nataraja wants us to feel enlightened, fresh and undaunted. He is bestowing his grace on us. But how do we receive that grace ? How can we keep on receiving it ?

The lower left Hand provides the answer. It is shown lying across the body directing the gaze onto the foot which is pressing on a struggling dwarf. In the scriptures it is called Gaja hasta "the elephant hand." The movement of the hand depicts the trunk of an elephant. Here lies the deeper meaning. While dealing with the image of Ganesha, we have explained the significance of the trunk. It can pick up or break a heavy object ; it can also handle the most delicate blade of grass. This shows an acute sense of discrimination. This mudra inspires us to rise above a confused state of mind (struggling dwarf) and to use our sense of discrimination in choosing between the pairs of opposites like good and bad, likes and dislikes, pleasure and pain, we come across in life at every step. We have to make a choice and then follow the thread with discrimination. Those who are looking for money will have to choose the means which will help them get more money. Those who are looking for a higher position will have to follow the same line and those who have not found happiness and peace will have to apply this formula. They shall have to rise above illusions and false attachments. If we are looking for everlasting peace, we have to adopt true, enduring means. Discrimination, acute discrimination with knowledge, is the answer.

The Raised Left Foot :

This foot in this position suggests that we can raise ourselves to the level of salvation. This is a positive reassurance to those who are looking for peace. If you carefully watch, you will find that there is a slant in the lower hand, which is the hand of protection. towards the left raised foot. This indicates need to surrender to the Almighty. "Surrender to me and I shall bring you salvation" (Geeta). This is the sign of satoguna.

The Right Foot :

It is shown pressing on a struggling dwarf. It provides a finale to the lesson on salvation. The right foot is suggestive of strength

and knowledge. Lord Shiva is shown here putting his full weight on the dwarf and balancing himself on him, as if trying to crush him under his weight. To appreciate this aspect let us first understand what is meant by the struggling dwarf :

The Struggling Dwarf :

The scriptures have named this dwarf as अपस्मार पुरुष "Apasmara Purusha." "Apasmara" is indicative of the confused state of mind when intelligence is clouded and all activity becomes muddled. In short, it means intellect engulfed by illusion and delusion, false attachments, desire and ignorance and moral lethargy. This "Purusha" within us prevents us from realising our own essential divinity. The word "Purusha" used with this state of mind is suggestive of its strength. It is for us to crush firmly this ignorance if we want to attain supreme, everlasting bliss which is our true heritage.

Viewing the right foot balanced on this "Apasmara Purusha," we are told to weed out all ignorance, by using our power of determination and discrimination.

In forms depicting the dance of creation, the posture of the Apasmara Purusha is pleasing. He is not being crushed but tickled. In that state he is smiling and fondling a snake. The snake in his hand signifies time (Kala).

The Ring of Flames :

This is the "prabha mandala" (luminous circle) around the Lord. It is composed of five flames. It represents the five "tatvas" in their subtle and gross forms. When there is desire and when Maya (illusion) is active, these flames start playing round the Lord. They indicate the dance of Nature with the Lord in the centre—all emanating from him and all dissolving in him. It signifies the transitory nature of the world. When their colour is reddish, it symbolises creation ; when it is blackish, it symbolises destruction.

Matted Locks :

While Lord Shiva is dancing, his matted locks represent power. Swinging represents movement. The Lord is power. He is the source of all movements.

The Ganges :

It signifies the purifying grace that flows from the Lord. It can remove ignorance, end stagnation and purify our souls.

The Crescent Moon :

It signifies periodicity and time. It is delicate in form. It has a promise for life of radiance and glory. Its placing on the left side of the head indicates a descending trend, i.e., destruction. It also indicates supreme bliss. When the Lord is dancing for creation, the moon is shown on the right side of the head. It is in the ascending order.

The Softly Closed Eyes :

The Lord, while enacting the divine drama, is thoroughly enjoying it. This is a state of complete happiness and tranquility. In both creation and destruction he is immersed in his own bliss.

The Serene Face :

It is apparently paradoxical to look serene while performing the dance of destruction. But this is inherent in the nature of the Lord. While His body moves in frenzy, his inner nature is completely at peace. Even though it is the play of his own creative powers, he is its spectator. As Lord Krishna says in the Geeta "Even while doing every thing I am not the doer." He is the source of restfulness for the troubled world.

Kundalas :

The kundalas of man and woman in the two ears signify that the whole dance of creation, sustenance and destruction is a play of the Supreme Lord and his consort Maya, of Purusha and Prakriti.

Aura

The aura behind Nataraja varies in shade according to the function. When the Lord is dancing for destruction, the shade of the aura is darkish and when he is dancing for creation, it is pinkish red.

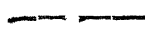
The *cremation ground* in the back indicates destruction. Philosophically it symbolises the heart of a seeker where his attachments and desires are burnt. When ego and delusions are completely burnt out, the seeker experiences divine bliss dancing in his heart all the time.

There are many forms of Nataraja. We find a very unusual idol in which the Lord is seen dancing on Nandi (the divine bull). He has innumerable arms and is holding innumerable objects in his hands.

Somewhere we find him dancing with his consort, both dancing together. Sometime we find both having merged into each other and dancing as half male, half female (Ardhanarīateshwar). Each one has its definite meaning. We mention here the most popular Nadant dance (dance of destruction).

(1) नृत (Nrit), (2) चतुर नृत्य (Chatur Nritya), (3) ताल सम्फोटित, (Tal Samphotit), (4) भङ्गि नाट्य (Bhanginatya), (5) भ्रमरायित नाट्य (Bhr-amrait Natya), (6) उदण्ड ताण्डव (Uddand Tandav), (7) चण्ड ताण्डव Chand Tandav, (8) उर्ध्व ताण्डव (Urdhva Tandav), (9) सव्य ताण्डव (Savia Tandav), (10) महा ताण्डव (Maha Tandav), (11) परमानन्द ताण्डव (Parmanand Tandav), (12) महा प्रलय ताण्डव (Maha Pralaya Tandav), (13) महोग्र ताण्डव (Mahogra Tandav), (14) परिभ्रमन ताण्डव (Paribhraman Tandav) (15) प्रचण्ड ताण्डव (Prachand Tandav).

Nataraja is one of the outstanding examples of the intellectual ingenuity of man, of his sense of art and imagination. We find images of Nataraja all over India. Where there are works of art, we find Nataraja being honoured as the presiding deity. Innumerable models have been exported from India mostly as decorative pieces but once we are able to appreciate the significance behind this, we will all the more enjoy keeping these images in our homes. They will become a source of inspiration to us and a constant reminder of higher life.





13

SHIVA LINGA

The word “Linga” can be divided into two main phonetic parts : ल—la (L₁) =लय “laya” (dissolution);

ग—ga (gam) =आगमन “agaman” (re-creation)

लय गच्छन्ति भूतानि सहारे निखिल यत : ।

सृष्टि काले पुनः सृष्टि स्तक्ष्माल्लिङ्गम् मुदाहृतम् ॥¹

“Layam Gachhanti Bhutani Samhare Nikhilam Yatah,
Shrishti-Kale Punah Srishtih Tasmad Lingam Mudahritam.”

“That entity in which the whole creation merges at the time of dissolution and out of which it re-appears at the time of fresh creation is called the Linga.”

This and many definitions given in the scriptures establish that “linga” means the symbol of absolute, total Brahma. That is why we have Shiva linga, Brahma linga, Vaishnav linga², Jyotir (light) linga, Gagan (sky) linga, Bodh³ linga, (knowledge) Vayu (air) linga, Jwala (fire) linga, Janan linga⁴ etc. etc.

A mythological story says that Brahma and Vishnu once got into an argument about their relative importance. Each tried his best to prove himself superior to the other. When the argument could not settle the issue, they went for advice to Shiva. Shiva, instead

(1) Ling Puran—(99—8).

(2) Prantoshni (Bungakshar; Calcutta—Kand I, Parichhed 1)

(3) Yogvashishat—Nirvan Prakaran.

(3) Nataraj Sahaster Nama (531 name).

of satisfying them with His own arguments, appeared before them in the form of a huge pillar of fire starting from the heart of the earth and going high up in the sky. Appearing in that pillar of fire Shiva said : "He who shall be able to find my beginning and end, shall be deemed superior." Both tried very hard for a long time but failed.

It is this pillar which later came to be known as an emblem of Shiva (Brahma) and became popular as Shiva Linga¹.

The word "Linga" has been used in various books as synonym of symbol, "measure" and "number." In Nataraja Sahasranama, (treatise giving thousand names of Nataraja) there is mention of Jnana linga (symbol of knowledge). In Brahma Sutras, it variously means "beyond guess" as well as "indicator." The Upanishads describe "Linga" as a symbol of Brahman. Later literature conveys the ideas that the unmanifest God-Principle is "Linga."

In spite of all this, there are people who have seen in this symbol only the representation of a phallus on top of a vagina. It is, perhaps, natural to try to explain away this symbol with reference to the procreative urge in human beings but to brand the worship of Shiva Linga as phallic worship is an instance of intellectual short-sightedness verging on perversion.

If linga had meant phallus people in India would have never given Lingaraj, Mahalingam and Lingaswami as names to their children. They would have never built Lingaraj, temple in Bhubaneswar (Orissa).

लयं गच्छन्ति भूतानि.....

"Layam Gachhanti Bhutani....."

This part of the verse quoted above suggests that Shiva Linga is that entity in which all animate objects get absorbed at the time of dissolution.

सृष्टि काले पुनः सृष्टि

"Srishti kale punah srishti" indicates that at the time of creation it recreates". Such meaning can only be attributed to the Absolute Brahman, the Supreme Lord.

1. Kurma Puran, Shiva Purana Vayu Purana (Chapter 55) Ling Purana (Ch. 17) Matsya Purana (Ch. 60—4) Neelmat Purana (Ch. 135) and Sour Purana (Ch. 66)

The *process of the formation of Shiva Linga* has been explained in “Shivopaniṣad” (chapter 2, verses 3—6). The Linga is made of three parts. One part remains under ground, the middle part remains on the pedestal and the third one on top is actually worshipped. The part which remains covered by the ground is four-sided; that which remains on the pedestal is eight-sided and the one which is worshipped is round. The height of the round part should be one third of its circumference. These three parts symbolise Brahma at the bottom, Vishnu in the middle and Shiva on top. This represents the three lokas (The world, the underworld and heaven), the three gunas (Rajoguna, Tamoguna, Satoguna), the three stages of Jagriti (wakefulness)—Swapna (dream) and Sushupti (sleep), three Vedas (Rig, Sama, Yajur) and the Holy Trinity¹.

This also symbolises the three states of Omkara (A, U and M) Brahman.

Detailing the *formation of the upper part* of the linga, “Shilapratna” (chapter 31) says that it should be in the following form :—

(i) chhatrakara (umbrella-shaped), (ii) like the upper part of a cucumber,, (iii) like a hen’s egg (iv) like the half-moon (v) and like a drop of water.

You will find that no where it has been said that it should be made like a phallus. In ancient India thinkers had no inhibition in clearly discussing the private parts of the body. Their language was scientific. They had written the masterly work on sex—the Kamasutra. If they wanted, they could be poetically suggestive or obscure. The original concept of the Linga was at the highest philosophical level of Poorna Brahma (the Supreme Being.)

The same is the case with the *pedestal* on which the Linga rests. “Shilapratna” says that the pedestal can be three-sided, four-sided, eight-sided, sixteen-sided or twenty-two sided—and

1. (a) श्री विद्यार्णव तन्त्र ॥ स्वास.

(b) आग्नेय महापुराण Chapter 53—54.

(c) Shivopaniṣad Chap. 2. Sloka 3—6.

(d) Elements of Hindu Iconography Vol. II Pt. II Madras 1916.

round. This description falsifies those who treat it as a representation of vagina.

ABSOLUTE BRAHMA is being worshipped in the Linga form in India from time immemorial. Starting from Kanya Kumari to Amarnath in Kashmir and Kailash in Tibet, and from Gujarat to Assam, Shiva Linga has been worshipped. It is said that before the time of Prophet Mohammed, the Linga was widely worshipped in Arab countries. Linga worship in one form or another is still in vogue in countries like Ireland, England, Greece, Egypt and Japan. Hodder M. Westrop says that Shiva Linga has been known in Greece, Rome, Syria, Old America, Germany and France by different names like Periapus, Fassinum, Pripe and Gala¹. Sir William Jones says that the Absolute God principle is venerated in Egypt in the name of Osiris and Isis. These are only the modified forms of the Indian names "Ishwara" and "Ish." From the writing of Plutarch, it seems that in his days, the worship of the Linga was prevalent in Egypt. In Christian literature (in the 15th chapter of the Book of Kings), there is a story which says that Assha son of Raihogoyam, forbade his mother Mamaka from making a sacrifice before the Linga. Later, in a fit of rage, he destroyed the Linga. Jews used to worship Bailego in the form of the Linga. They had installed a linga and an idol of a calf on a hilltop in a jungle. They used to make Shiva Linga in stone, install it and worship it as 'baal'. They used to burn incense before the altar of "Baal" and worship the bull opposite the Linga on every Amavasya night (no moon night). In Egypt, there used to be a stone bull before the Osiris linga.

According to Col. Tod, the Linga, was worshipped in Arab countries before Prophet Mohammed's times, in the name of 'Laat.' The Linga in the Somnath Temple was described as 'laat' (see the word 'laat' in Richardson's dictionary, 1829).

It is said that "Sang-a-asvad" in Mecca is nothing but a Shiva Linga made of black stone.

1 —Primitive Symbolism as Illustrated in Phallic Worship.

Sir William Jones—Sanskrit Texts. Messers. George, Redway, London Vol. VI Page 318.

In Peruvia, a section of the community was called Surya Vanshi (of the clan of the Sun). They celebrated a festival known as "Rama Sitaya". Some of the tribes there call God as 'sibru', (Shibbu, Shibbu, Shiva.)

Some people in Syria, worshipped a god whom they called "Seva" or "Sevajaya". Snakes found a place in their rituals. In Egypt also, snakes were connected with Seva.

All this indicates that the worship of Lord Shiva in the Linga form has been prevalent in many parts of the world.

In Skand Purana, the sky has been compared to the Linga. There is a scientific basis for this. Eienstien has proved that the limitless sky is curved. The earth is also curved. Time, space and elements which comprise this universe are all curved. Right from the atom and the molecule, from the microcosm to the macrocosm, every thing is curved and is like the Linga. Actually what we see as a straight line is only a small fragment of the whole which is curved.

Eienstien's Theory of Relativity is presently ruling the scientific world. According to him, there is nothing like the force of gravity of the earth. Things fall on it because of curvature. The greater the matter in an object, the more defined is the curvature and hence the greater force of tension. The magnitude of this universe is beyond human comprehension. It takes millions of years for light to reach from a star to the earth. Such is the magnitude of this universe. What would be the magnitude of that Absolute God out of whom all this creation has emerged. This sense of awe is represented by the Linga.

For ritualistic and psychological purposes, the Linga has been given an objective form. In fact it represents the formless God principle. The scriptures testify that when the formless God took form, he appeared in the form of a Linga of light (jyotirlinga) which is another name for the universe (brahmanda). The universe is supposed to be egg-shaped. This is why its symbolic form is of the shape of an egg. The top of the Linga is round because it symbolises the round world. The world too is a reflection of the Supreme Lord. The Linga is said to be "the map of the universe."

In the worship of the Linga lies the worship of all the deities.

“Shiva” stands for *ashabda-brahman*, the unqualified one. Linga, according to the Skanda Purana, is the name for space in which the whole universe is in the process of formation and dissolution. Shivalinga, the all pervading space, thus symbolises a cosmic form, serenely detached and self-sufficient, whereas “Shakti,” the *Shabda-brahman*, is the creative impulse in the cosmic process. *Gauri-patta* represents *adya shakti*, the energy quanta ; *mahamaya*, the power of manifestation ; *yoni*, the primal root or the source of objectivation ; Hence Shivalinga with Gauri-patta is the embodiment of both inaction and action. In the hands of the artists, this manifestation is expressed in the form of *lingayoni* or vermillion daubs,

In the egg shaped “*brahmanda*”, the globe-shaped “*saligrama*”, or the Shivalinga, the artist tries to release the symbols imprisoned in stone by a reduction of the material to its absolute essence. Matter is made to yield its intrinsic nature, the inert becomes alive.

There is no falshbooyance or associative corruption.

According to Tantra, the ultimate truth is the union of Shiva and Shakti, or Purusha and Prakriti.

Once this is clearly understood, Shiva linga ceases to be an object. It becomes the representation of the Absolute-God principle (*Mahachaitanya Siddhanta*).

Twelve Jyotirlingas :

In India people venerate twelve “self-effulgent” lingas. They are, according to the Shiva Purana :

(i) Somnatha in Saurashtra, (ii) Mallikarjuna at Shri Shaailam (Andhra Pradesh) (iii) Mahakaleshwara (Ujjain) (iv) Omkareshwara (Mandhatapur), Neemar (Madhya Pradesh) (v) Vaidyanath in Deoghar (Bihar), (vi) Bhima Shankara (Dakini, Poona), (vii) Rameshwaram in Ramanathapuram, (Tamil Nadu), (viii) Naganatha (Jamnagar District), (ix) Vishveshwarnatha (Kashi), (x) Tryambakanatha Nasik, (Maharashtra), (xi) Kedareshwara in the Himalayas, (xii)

Amareshwara (Amarnath, Kashmir).

“If Prakriti from whom innumerable universes issue is the total yoni, so also the supreme spirit who rules over these innumerable universes is the total linga, and the eggs of innumerable universes which spring forth from them are the creation.”

In order to further clarify the real meaning behind this symbol of the formless Brahman, sometimes one, three and five faces are shown on the Shivalinga. One face represents the Supreme without a second. Three faces indicate the three Gunas. In that case, the front face is dynamic with a slightly open mouth which symbolises Rajoguna. The left face is shown in a very peaceful countenance symbolising Satoguna. The right face is shown in an angry gesture symbolising Tamoguna. In a Shivalinga with five faces, usually four are shown. The front face is shown in colour close to the burning fire. The back face is shown in bright colour. The northern face is red and the southern face is shown in terrifying black colour. The fifth face is known as Ishan which is beyond perception and comprehension.

PART V

Chapter XIV : The Endless Quest

Chapter XV : Some Classical Sanskrit Expressions

Chapter XVI : Origin of Words
(Based on Panini and Nirukta)

Chapter XVII : Bibliography

EPILOGUE

THE ENDLESS QUEST

Swami Vivekananda used to say that to put Hindu ideas into English and then make out of dry philosophy, intricate mythology and queer startling psychology a religion which would be easy, simple, popular and at the same time meet the requirements of the highest minds was a task only those could understand who had attempted it. The abstract Advaita must become living and poetic in everyday life ; out of hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms ; and out of bewildering Yog-ism must come the most scientific and practical psychology. All this must be put in a form so that a child may grasp it. He added : That is my life's work.

Following in his sacred footsteps I have felt that body and mind mutually react upon each other. Physical sadhana has to be done as groundwork for mental sadhana. Indian thinkers have, for ages, recognised this fact and laid down theories and practices against this background.

Mind is aptly compared to the door keeper who lets some people enter and keeps others out.

The Brhadaranyaka Upanisad says : "My Mana (Mind) was elsewhere and, therefore, I did not hear."

This is the secret of endurance of pain : when the sensation is passed onto Buddhi (intellect), whether from objects outside or from memory, there is formed in the Buddhi a Vritti (Impression).

A Vritti is a modification of mind into the form of a perceived physical or mental object. Normally, it is not possible to avoid the formation of mental Vrittis (impression). The object, therefore, of sadhana is first to take one's attention away from undesirable objects and then to place a desirable object in their place. Mind must feed on something. It cannot remain idle.

Mind can be controlled by means of its own objects (Vishaya) that is, the world of name and form (Namarupa). The same Namarupa can be used as the first escape therefrom. A particular form therefore, of Namarupa, productive of pure Bhava emotion or idea is given as the object of meditation.

Material media are used as initial steps whereby the Formles one is understood symbolically. Some of them are :

Images (Pratima)	Emblems (Linga—Saligrama)
Picture (Ghata)	Mural marking (Bhittirekha)
Jar (Chitra)	Circle (Mandala)
Geometrical form (Yantra)	

All men do not happen to be at the same level of intellectual and spiritual development. For the simple-minded, there are simple material and mental images.

An image is not only used for instruction or for making in the mind a picture. How can God be told to come and go ? The Christian who sings the hymn "Veni Creator Spiritus" believes that on his request the Holy Ghost comes to him.

Adi Shankaracharya has clarified this point. He says : Atma (Spirit) never comes and never goes. That which, in fact, moves is the mind of the seeker in which, if pure, spirit manifests itself. That spirit is in all places and when the seeker's mind fully realises its presence in the image, the latter as the manifestation of that spirit is a fitting object of worship.

The scriptures make wonderful provision for all types of images. They recognise that there must be a definite object in keeping with the capacity of the seeker and he should accordingly regulate the worship. The worship of material media, whether they are idols or

yantras, is so prescribed that the body takes part in the ritual so as to emphasise the mental operation. In addition, certain mudras (symbolic gestures) are also prescribed. When the body takes part in a ritual, the mental process is intensified. This is based on a natural tendency that one helps and supports the other. When we speak with conviction and intensity of feeling we naturally adopt appropriate movements of the body and gestures of hands.

Those who have seen or gone through a nursery or a kindergarten institution know that a teacher often asks children to recite a poem with gestures or actions. The idea is to deepen the impression on the mind with the help of physical action. Prolonged repetition of one or both generates energy in the mind which can manifest itself. Repetition of a word or an idea fixes it in the mind and if the same essential thought is presented in varied forms, the effect is more powerful and at the same time less tiresome.

By endorsing an idea through a repetitive pattern of symbols our mind is in a position to imbibe and keep that idea. Our mind is purified by constant effort and thus it becomes a suitable medium for the manifestation of Divine Consciousness. This is the main purpose behind the apparently overlapping symbolism we have discussed in the preceding chapters.

Psychology allows the principle that Thought is itself a force, and that by Thought alone, without any known physical means, the thoughts of others can be affected. Occultism may and does avail itself of physical means to stimulate and intensify the force and direction of thought. This is the intention behind magic rituals which have been so much ridiculed. Why is black the colour of Marana Karnk (a black magic method of annihilation through 'remote control'). The answer is : That colour incites, maintains and emphasizes the will to kill. So hypnotism as an instance of the exercise of the power of thought makes use of gestures, rotatory instruments and so forth.

The black magician, having a firm faith in his (or her) power, (for faith in occultism as in religion is 'essential') surrounds himself (or herself) with every incentive for concentrated, prolonged and malevolent thought.

A figure or an object like a part of the clothing, hair or nail of the "victim" represents the person to be attacked by magic.

This serves as the "immediate object" on which the magical thought is expanded. The magician is helped by this and similar aids to a state of fixed and malignant attention which is rendered intense by action taken on the substituted object. It is not, of course, the injuries to the person attacked, but the thought of the black-magician of which these injuries are a materialisation. There are thus present the circumstances which a modern psychologist would demand for success in a telepathic experiment.

There is an inherent power in symbolism.

The power of "symbolism" derives not merely from the psychological effect which it may have on particular minds likely to be affected by it but from itself as a law external to human thought.

The quintessence of symbolism lies in the fact that thought is a force and that its operation is in a field of consciousness which is wider than that of which the mind is ordinarily aware.

To take our discussion further, we can find for ourselves that all letters are forms of Shabda Brahma (cosmic sound) but only particular combinations of letters have a particular meaningful form, just as the name of a particular being is made up of certain letters and not made indiscriminately. The whole universe is Shakti (power) and is pervaded by Shakti. Nada (sound), Bindu (dot), Varna (colour) are all forms of Shakti and combinations of these, and these combinations are Shabdas (words corresponding to Artha—meaning) or forms of any particular deity.

The human mind has accepted symbols not as products of superstition but as concrete means to come to grips with difficult or obscure ideas.

In this endless quest of mine, I have gone through symbolic gamuts to point out that superficial ways of understanding the symbolic meanings of various representations of Indian (Hindu) deities do us no good either intellectually or emotionally. While dealing with religious symbolism we deal with superior ideas and higher stages of thoughts.

I have only presented some examples. If these serve to get people at home and abroad interested in having a deeper view of spiritual representations, I shall feel amply rewarded.

I am aware that while I am asking for a continuation of my quest, I am attributing a sense of endlessness to such a quest. But am I asking for the Moon ? That again is a symbol.

Since life must continue and with it must go on the processes of thinking and expression, my asking for the indulgence of fellow-pilgrims on my path of quest may not be out of place.

SOME CLASSICAL SANSKRIT EXPRESSIONS

Abhimana	Delusion (of empirical knowledge).
Absolute (Poorna) Brahma	The impersonal, supreme and incognisable Principle of the universe.
Adhyaksha	Overseer of the body : individual soul.
Adhyasa	The (wrong) transference.
Adhyatma	Pertaining to the Atman, spiritual.
Adhyaya	Main section in books.
Agni	God of fire.
Ahamkara	The first tendency towards definiteness, re- garded as the origin of all manifestations. In man the conception of "I", self-con- sciousness for self-identity, the illusion of self as self-separate existence in contra- diction to the reality of the universal One Self. Also ego.
Akara	Form.
Akasha	The subtle, supersensuous, spiritual essence which prevades all space. The primordial substance erroneously identified with ether. But it is to ether what spirit is to matter.

It is the Eternal Space in which lies inherent the ideation of the universe in its ever-changing aspects on the planes of matter and objectivity and from which radiates the First Logos or expressed thought.

Aksharam	The Imperishable Brahman.
Amrita :	The essence of immortality ; nectar.
Amritatvam	Immortality, deliverance from dying.
Ananda	Bliss.
Ankan	Marking.
Antahprerana	Intuition.
Antahkarana	The subtle inner organ (faculty).
Antah Chetna	Consciousness.
Antah-atman	The inner self, the soul.
Antaryamin	The inner ruler, Brahman.
Anu	Fine, subtle, minute.
Anubhava	Sensation, feeling, (inner) perception.
Apana	Inhaling.
Atman	Self, Soul, God.
Atmavidya	The teaching of the Atman.
Ashrama	Hemitage.
Astral (Sookshma)	The region of expression of all feeling and desires of the human soul.
Astral Body (Sookshma Sharira)	A body formed by the consciousness of the entity, consisting of matter more subtle than gross matter comprising the physical body which it generally resembles in form. It serves in a sense as an intermediary between the soul-mind and the physical brain and body.
Atma (n)	“The Self”. The Universal Spirit. The

seventh principle in the septenary constitution of man. The Supreme Soul. The spirit-essence of the universe. (Parmatman—"the Self Beyond").

Atmavidya	The teaching of the Atman.
Aura (Prabha Mandala)	A subtle, invisible essence or fluid that emanates from human, animal, and even inanimate bodies. A psychic effluvium, superphysical and physical, including the electrovital emanations from the physical body in the case of man.
Avtara	The doctrine of Divine Incarnation or "descent".
Avidya	Ignorance.
Avidyavastha	The empirical point of view.
Avyaktam	The Unmanifest Brahman.
Ayurveda	An ancient system of medicine still prevalent in India.
Baba	An expression of respect used for old people, particularly for saints.
Bhagavana	God, respected person.
Bhoga	Enjoyment.
Bhrama	The error (of empirical knowledge),
Bhutam	Element, living being.
Brahmacharin	A religious student or celibate, who lives with his Guru, devoted to study and service.
Brahmacharya	Celibacy, chastity. The stage of life of Vedic study in which chastity and service are essential.
Brahmasutras	An authoritative book of aphorisms on Vedanta.

Brahman	The impersonal, supreme and incognisable principle of the universe, from the essence of which all persons or things emanate and into which all return.
Buddhi	The sixth principle of man, that of intuitive wisdom, vehicle of the seventh; Atma, the supreme soul in man. Universal soul. The faculty which manifests as spiritual intuitiveness. The bliss aspect of the Trinity.
Causal Body (Karna Sharira)	The immortal body or the reincarnating ego of man, built of matter of the "higher" levels of the mental world. It is called causal because it gathers up within it the results of all experiences, and these act as causes moulding future lives and influencing future conduct.
Chakra	"Wheel" or disc. A spinning, vertical funnel-shaped force-centre with its opening on the surfaces of the etheric and subtler bodies of man and its stem leading to one super-physical counter-part of the spinal cord and of nerve-centres or glands. Chakras are both organs of superphysical consciousness and conveyor of the life-force between the superphysical and physical bodies.
Creation (Srishti)	The emergence and subsequent development of a universe and its contents is regarded in occult philosophy as being less the result of an act of creation, followed by natural evolution, than a process of emanation guided by intelligent forces under immutable laws.
Dakshina	Reward of sacrifice.
Dana	Giving.

Darshana	Seeing, seeing through an object or illusion, philosophy.
Deeksha	Initiation, certain vows.
Deva	Old Vedic God.
Devaloka	World of the Gods, region of the Devayana.
Dhama	Abode.
Dharma	Religion, duty, righteousness.
Dharmashala	A charitable house for pilgrims.
Divine Mother (Devī Ma)	The aspect of the Uncreated Infinite which is active in creation, is referred to in Hindu scriptures as the Divine Mother.
Ego (See Ahamkara)	The threefold, immortal, unfolding spiritual self of man in its vesture of light, the "Robe of Glory" of the agnostics and the vesture Sharīra or Causal Body of Hindu Philosophy. This higher Triad evolves to adeptship by virtue of successive lives on earth, all linked together because they are reincarnations of the same spiritual Self. Thus Ego is an individualised manifestation of the Monad, which is the eternal Self of man, the Dweller in the innermost, a unit of the Spirit-Essence of the universe. The term denotes the unfolding spiritual self of man in which the attribute of individuality inheres. The adjective "Egoic" refers to Ego in this sense.
Entity (Astittva)	Often used, in the personal sense, to refer to the individual being manifesting in the mental physical universe to the extent that it has identified itself with soul-mind. The entity includes the record of all the experiences through which it has passed.

In the pure or universal sense, however, the entity is not a record of experiences, but that which is Being itself, beyond matter, energy, space, or time ; Love, individualized, or in its process of becoming individualized.

Egotism
(See Ahamkara)

The ego-principle, ahamkara (literally, "I do"), is the root cause of dualism or the seeming separation between man and his Creator.

Gayatri

The Goddess of Purity ; a popular hymn of this name is known as the Gayatri Mantra.

Gita-Govindam

A Sanskrit idyll composed by Jayadeva, displaying the allegorical love between Krishna and Radha.

God (Ishwara)

In occult philosophy the term "God" in its highest meaning refers to a Supreme, Eternal and Indefinable Reality. This Absolute is inconceivable, ineffable and unknowable. Its revealed existence is postulated in three terms ; Absolute Existence, Absolute Consciousness and Absolute Bliss. Infinite consciousness is regarded as inherent in the supreme being as a dynamic force that manifests the potentialities held in its own infinitude, and calls into being forms out of its own formless depths.

Gopis

Radha's friends.

Gopa : cowherd (masculine) ; Gopi (feminine).

Guha

Cave

Gunas
(a) Satoguna

A string or cord. The three qualities or attributes inherent in matter : *Rajas*, activity,

(b) Rajoguna	desire ; <i>Sattva</i> , harmony, rhythm ; <i>Tamas</i> ,
(c) Tamoguna	inertia, stagnation. These correspond to the three Aspects of the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Ghost—or Brahma, Vishnu Shiva, respectively.
Guru	Preceptor. The spiritual-preceptor that introduces the disciple to God. The term “Guru” differs from “teacher”, as a person may have many teachers but only one guru.
Havana (Homa)	A religious sacrifice in which oblations are offered in fire.
Hiranyagarbha	A mytholocal personification of the creative power.
Hridayagranthi	The knot of the heart.
Indra	Old Vedic God.
Indriyas	Organs of perception and will—they are ten besides mind.
Intuition (Antah-Prerana)	The “sixth sense” ; apprehension of knowledge derived immediately and spontaneously from the ‘soul, not from the fallible medium of the senses or of reason.
Jagat	World, especially the ensouled ; defined.
Janma	Birth.
Jiva	The individual soul.
Jnana	Spiritual knowledge.
Jnana-kanda	Part of knowledge in the Veda.
Kala	A Sanskrit word which translates literally as “time” or “death” and which refers to time consciousness, or that which is not eternal in nature, temporal, illusory, therefore, deceptive, sometimes referred to as

the deceiver or Satan ; related to strictly mental and physical realities as contrasted with Spiritual reality.

Kama

Desire,

Karma

A Sanskrit word denoting the concept of action and reaction, as essentially expressed in "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap" (Galatians 6 : 7) reactive memory, a product of mind. Karma refers to the results of actions and thoughts, whether these occurred in the present embodiment or have been carried over from the past-life experiences.

Krishna

An avatara (incarnation) of Vishnu whose divine counsel in the Bhagwat Gita is revered by all God-seekers. In early life he was a cowherd who enchanted his companions with the music of his flute. Allegorically, Lord Krishna represents the soul playing on the flute of life to guide all misled thoughts back to the fold of omniscience.

Kshema

Cessation of wandering, liberation.

Kundalini

The coiled up, universal life principle. A seven fold, superphysical, occult power in universe and man, functioning in the latter by means of a spiral or coiling action, mainly in the spinal cord but also throughout the nervous system. It is represented in Greek symbology by Caduceus. When supernormally aroused, this fiery force ascends into the brain by a serpentine path, hence its other name, the Serpentine Fire. It may rise through the practice of certain disciplines or it may be raised spontaneously in states of spiritual enlightenment.

Leela	Play, the inexplicable ways of providence.
Lingam	Physically, the phallus. A symbol of creation.
Macrocosm (Brahmanda— Tribhuvana)	Literally "Great Universe", or Cosmos.
Manas	"Mind". Generally used in reference to the planes of nature built of the mind-stuff, and to the mental faculties of man.
Mantra	Sacred formula for liberation.
Maya	Cosmic delusion ; literally, "the measurer". Maya is the magical power in creation by which limitations and divisions are apparently present in the immeasurable and inseparable.
Math	Monastic institution.
Meditation	Turning the conscious mind to a point of stillness whereby the spiritual nature is capable of creating in it an instrumentality of created expression, discernment, and effective activity at the material plane ; the act of attuning to the spiritual source facilitating movement into or towards an increasingly direct awareness of reality.
Microcosm	Little Universe. The reflection in miniature of the Macrocosm. Thus the atom may be spoken of as the "Microcosm" of the solar system, its electrons moving under the same laws ; and man may be termed the "Microcosm" of the universe since he has within himself all the elements of that universe.
Mimansa	Research.
Moksha	To release. One who is thus released is called Jivanmukta, "freed spirit."

	Liberation from the delusion of self-separateness.
Nama-rupam	(Name and form i. e., impressions of ear and eye, sense-impressions) the sense-world.
Nimittam	The cause, the motive.
Nirgunam	Brahma, the attribute-free (higher) Brahman.
Nirguna vidya	The doctrine of the higher Brahman.
Nirvana	“Having life extinguished”. Conscious absorption in the One Life of the Cosmos, or Absolute Consciousness (Buddhism).
Nirvikalpa Samadhi	The highest or irrevocably God-united stage of samadhi. The first or preliminary stage (characterized by trance, bodily immobility) is called sabikalpa samadhi.
Nirvishesha Brahma	The undifferentiated (higher) Brahman.
Nyaya	The system of Gautama.
Om	Sound symbol of Brahman.
Padma Nala	The stem of a lotus (for details refer to the chapter on Brahma).
Parabrahma	Beyond Brahma. The Supreme, Infinite Brahma, the Absolute attributeless Reality, Impersonal God.
Parmanu	Atom.
Paramatman	The highest soul, Brahman.
Parambrahma	The higher Brahman.
Prajapati	Mythological personification of the creative power.
Prakriti	Nature of matter as opposed to that of spirit, the two primeval aspects of the “One Unknown Deity.”

Pralaya	Epoch of quiescence. A period of obscuration or repose, whether planetary or universal. These are said to be four kinds of Pralayas or such states of changelessness ; cosmic Pralaya, when the total of the manifested universe is dissolved ; partial Pralaya, referring to any component which is dissolved during Maha-Manvantara ; human Pralaya, when man has identified himself with the Absolute or entered Nirvana, and physical Pralaya as in a state of profound and dreamless sleep. Pralaya, then refers to the period when the life of a globe, round, chain or solar system is partially or completely indrawn, activity or manifestation ceasing in part or in whole.
Prana	Breath, life ; especially the metaphysical life-principle, Brahman.
Pratikam	The symbol.
Pratibhigya Darshan :	Identification or seeing with the help of a suggestive evidence.
Prithivi	The earth.
Purohit	Priest.
Purusha	Man, spirit.
Pooja	Worship.
Pujari	One who does pooja, priest.
Purusha-artha	The aim of man, (liberation).
Pitambara Pragya	Wisdom that nourishes Truth.
Sadhu	One who pursues sadhana or path of spiritual discipline ; an ascetic.
Sagunam	Brahma, the attribute-possessing, lower Brahman.
Sakshin	The witness, spectator, soul.

Samadhi	Superconsciousness, Samadhi is attained following the eight-fold yoga path in which samadhi is the eighth step or final goal. Scientific meditation.
Samhita	Collection (vedic).
Samsara	Cycle, migration (of the soul).
Samskara	Impression, moral purification.
Sanchaya	Accumulation.
Sangama	Confluence (of rivers).
Sanyasa	Renunciation.
Sanyasin	One who has renounced the world and dedicated himself to spiritual realisation.
Siddhanta	The final opinion.
Shastras	Scriptures.
Satchidananda	Existence — Knowledge— Bliss ; Absolute Brahman.
Satsanga	Company of good people.
Seva	Service.
Shakti	“Ability”, power, capability, faculty, strength. The outgoing energy of a god is spoken of as his consort or shakti. Thus although a deity or a central personality and his consort or wife are presented as separate entities the latter (wife) actually personifies attributes or power of the former (husband). Consequently, the supposed pair in reality represents one being.
Siddhis	Occult powers developed by Yoga.
Shraddhaa	Respect ; faith (in Scriptures and Guru’s teachings).
Shraddha	Oblations to ancestors or the dead.
Soul	This word refers to the unfolding, immortal, spiritual self of a man, the true indivi-

duality behind the bodily veil. When referred to as individual soul this means, that which, in its initial stages of creation, first developed and thus became the vehicle of form through which Being could be grown into individuality, and which as soul-mind, records all the experiences through which an entity passes.

Spirit
(See Ataman)

Not an entity but that which belongs directly to Universal Consciousness. The most tenuous, formless, and immaterial spiritual substance, synonymous with God or Love, the Divine Essence. In Hebrew it is called E-Manu-El or "In Man-God."

Srishti

Outpouring, creation.

Sthula

Material ; sthula-shariram : the gross body.

Sukshmam

Shukshma shariram : The subtle body.

Swami

Master ; a member of India's most ancient monastic order, recognised in the eighth century by Shankaracharya. A swami takes formal vows of celibacy and renunciation of worldly ambitions ; he devotes himself to meditation and service to humanity. There are ten classificatory titles attached to the Swami Order, as Giri, Puri, Bharati, Tirtha, Saraswati, and others.

Sushupti

The deep sleep.

(sushuptam, supti)

Swapna

Dream-sleep, dream.

Tattva

The abstract principle of substance—the subtle elements ; the essential nature of things. "That-ness" or "quiddity".

Varada Hasta	The boon-giving hand.
Varada Mudra	The boon-giving posture.
Vedas, The	The four scriptural texts of the Hindus. The Rīg Veda, The Sama Veda, The Yajur Veda, and the Atharva Veda. They are essentially a literature of meditation and recitation. Among the immense texts of India, the Vedas (from the Sanskrit root 'Vid' to know, are the only writings to which no author is ascribed. The Rīgveda assigns a celestial origin to the hymns and tells us they have come down from "ancient times", reclothed in new language. Divinely revealed from age to age to the rishis, "seers", the Vedas possess nityatva, timeless finality".
Tejas	Heat, fire.
Trishna	Thirst, desire.
Upadhi	Limitation.
Varuna	Old Vedic god.
Vasana	(subjective) appearance.
Vayu	Air, wind.
Vedanta	(closing chapter of the Veda) the Upanishads.
Vidhi	Order, constituent part of the Brahman
Vidya	Knowledge.
Vishaya	Object
Vritti	Function.
Yoga	Literally, "union" of man with his maker through the practice of scientific techniques for self-realisation. The three main paths are Jnana Yoga (wisdom), Bhakti Yoga (devotion) and Raja Yoga (the royal or scientific path which includes the techni-

ques of Kriya Yoga). The oldest text extant on the sacred science is Patanjali's Yoga Sutas.

Yogi

One who practices Yoga. He need not be a man of formal renunciation ; a yogi is concerned solely with faithful, regular practice of scientific techniques for God-realisation.

16

ORIGIN OF WORDS (BASED ON PANINI AND NIRUKTA)

Brahma

ब्रह्मा — बृह बृहि वृद्धौ — बृह वृद्धौ
Brahma—brih brihi vridhou—brih vridhou.

यो अखिलं जगन्निर्माणेन बृहन्ति वर्द्धयति स ब्रह्मा
Yo akhīlam jag nirmanena brihanti vridhdhayati sa Brahma.

He who creates the whole universe and evolves it, is called Brahma.

Vishnu

विष्णु — विष्टृ व्याप्तौ + णु
Vishnu—Vishlri vyaptou+nu

वेवेष्टि व्याप्नोति चराचरं जगत् स विष्णुः
vaiveshti vyapnoti characharam jagat sa Vishnu.

He who pervades the animate and inanimate forms of the creation is called Vishnu.

Shiva

शिव — शिवु कल्याणे - बहुल मेतन्नि दर्शनम्

Shiva—Shivu kalyane—bahul metanni darshanam.

He who is benevolent and does benevolence to all is called Shiva.

Shankara

शंकर — (डुकृज करणे) शम्

Shankara—(dukrij kerne) sham

यः शङ्कल्याणं सुखं करोति सः शङ्करः

Yah shankalyanam sukham karoti sa Shankara.

He who is benevolent and comforting is called Shankara.

Mahadeva

महादेव — महत् + देवः यो महंतां देवः स महादेव

Mahadeva — mahat+deva—yo mahantam devah sa Mahadeva.

He who is God of Gods, wisest of the wise, illuminater of the Sun, the Moon etc., director of players—great dramatist, is known as Mahadeva.

Sarasawati

सरस्वती — सृ ‘गतौ’

Saraswati—sri “gatau”

सरो विविधं ज्ञानं विद्यते यस्यां चित्तौ सा सरस्वती

Saro vividham jnanam vidyate yasyam chittau sa Saraswati.

That peaceful ocean of divine consciousness where different types of knowledge is vibrating is called Saraswati.

Lakshmi

लक्ष्मी — लक्ष, दर्शनाङ्कयोः

Lakshmi—Lakshmi darshanamkayoh

(a) यो लक्षयति पश्यत्यङ्कते चिह्नयति चराचरं जगत्

(b) बेदैशप्तैर्योगिभिश्च यो लक्ष्येतः सा लक्ष्मीः ।

(a) Yo lakshayati pashyatyankate chinchayati characharam Jagat.

or (b) bedaishaptairyogibhischa yo lakshyetah sa Lakshmi.

One who is the perceiver and who defines the animate and inanimate world, who is the grace of all that is beautiful, who is the goal of all Vedas and scriptures and of Yogis, that is Lakshmi.

Durga

दुर्गा — दुः + ज्ञेय दुर्ज्ञेयोति दुर्गा

Durga—Duh+geya Durgeyoti=Durga.

One who is difficult to know is Durga.

Ganesha

गणेशः — गण (संख्याने) + ईशः

Ganesha—Gan (sankhyane) plus eeshah.

ये प्रकृत्यादयो जडा जीवाश्च गण्यन्ते

संख्या यन्ते तेषामीशः स्वामी पालको गणेशः

Ye prakṛitya dayo jada jivashcha ganyante

sankhya yante teshamishah swami palako Ganesah.

One who is the master and sustainer of animate and inanimate objects is known as Ganesha or Ganapati.

Kali

काल — यो कलयति सर्वाणि भूतानि सः कालः

Kala—Yo kalayati sarvani bhutani sa kalah.

One who systematically drives the cycle of the Universe (all matter and consciousness is Kala).

काली — काल संकलनात् काली ।

Kali—Kala sankalanat Kali.

One who systematically assembles Kala is Kali.

काली — कालं ग्रसयति या सा काली ।

Kali—Kalam grasayati ya sa Kali.

One who swallows Kala (time) is Kali.

Nataraja

नटराज — नटकृत्ये अवस्कन्देन

Nataraja—Natakritye avaskandena.

तस्य नृत्य प्रियत्वात् तत् क्रियायां तस्य निपुणत्वात्

Tasya nritya priyatwat tat kriyayam tasya nipunatwat.

One who is sweet and adept at dancing, the dance of evolution, creation and destruction is Nataraja.

Linga

(ल) लि

LA (LI)—laya (dissolution)

ग

Ga (Gam)—aagaman (recreation)

लयं गच्छन्ति भूतानि संहारे निखलं यतः

सृष्टि काले पुनः सृष्टि तस्मात् लिङ्गम् उदाहृतम्

Layam gachchanti bhutani samhara nikhilam yatah.

Srishti kale punah srishti tasmāt lingam udahritam.

That entity in which the whole creation merges at the time of dissolution and out of which it re-emerges at the time of fresh creation is called the Linga.

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